

THE MIND'S EYE

A Liberal Arts Journal

Massachusetts College of Liberal Arts

EXPERIENCE 2 BIG NITES

WITH: RAPUNKER AND 3 OTHER BANDS.

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Troubled Prophet: The Life and Death of Michael Metelica

By Thomas Weston Fels

Nathaniel Hawthorne as Art Critic: The Italian Experience and *The Marble Faun*

By Tony Gengareilly

Global Justice and the Absence of Universal Morality: Rawlsian Perspectives on Human Rights and International Relations

By Paul O. Nnodim

CORPUS

By Kelli Newby

Crossing Over: Hank Williams, Sam Cooke and the Birth of Modern Soul and Country

By Richard Taskin

\$7.50

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SPRING 2006

Massachusetts College of Liberal Arts

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The rock band drawn from the central Massachusetts commune Brotherhood of the Spirit, Spirit in Flesh, later changed its name to match that of its leader, Michael Metelica, when in the mid-1970s he chose to become known as Rapunzel. The band toured the Northeast extensively in 1975-1976, and the poster on the cover probably dates from 1975. (Elizabeth Hapgood Papers, Special Collections, W.E.B. DuBois Library, University of Massachusetts, Amherst)

Editor's File

Only a generation ago, the rock singer Michael Metelica attracted crowds of listeners and a band of cult followers, the Brotherhood of the Spirit; yet he once confessed to Thomas Weston Fels that he had ceased to grow after the age of 15. In our lead article, Fels explores the performer's truncated career and reflects on the personal drives that made him at once a compelling and an unbearable spirit. Tony Gengarely takes on another charismatic but incomplete man, the fictional Donatello of Hawthorne's *The Marble Faun*. Following Hawthorne, Gengarely views him through the eyes of American art lovers who had traveled to Italy, where they found themselves haunted, both by Donatello himself and by powerful sculpture evoking the lives of unfinished people.

In our third article, Paul Nnodim addresses a very different issue, John Rawls's monumental effort to define a cosmopolitan understanding of social justice. Nnodim applauds the wisdom of Rawls's great principle of justice as fairness, but he laments his inability to solve the problems raised by cultural disagreement—in particular, the problems raised by Muslim disagreement with modern pluralism. Kelli Newby's short story touches on a milder point of cultural conflict involving a young American student stranded in London at Christmas: Mourning a family death, she has to struggle with airlines and the international phone system amidst the city's pigeons, tourists and immigrants, all with lives of their own. Finally, Richard Taskin reviews two important biographies of Hank Williams and Sam Cooke, who struggled musically with the racial divisions of American life. Williams revealed the power of the blues to invigorate country-and-western music. Cooke sometimes found it difficult to adapt his Gospel heritage for white listeners, but he, too, achieved a powerful response during the Civil Rights era. Both men bridged a cultural gap that has been growing wider in recent years. Together they offer a challenge and, perhaps, a rebuke to the increasing resegregation of our own time.

Bill Montgomery, *Managing Editor*

Troubled Prophet: The Life and Death of Michael Metelica

By Thomas Weston Fels

From inside the car, rolling slowly along Main Street, the view through the smoked-glass windows was gratifying. Along the broad sidewalks of Turners Falls, a formerly depressed mill town in western Massachusetts, new businesses flourished. Where livelihood had been difficult, it now prospered. A way of life that had been endangered now seemed stable and protected. Several of the important properties in the town had come under the ownership of a thriving spiritual sect that had recently blossomed in the area, and its leader, the driver of the car, was satisfied for the moment with its progress.

"Let's head back to Warwick," he said to his companions, and the automobile accelerated on out of town, over its great mill dam and the bridge connecting the town's main street to the large state road to Boston. The year was 1973. The destination was the organization's compound some ten miles away. The automobile was a Rolls-Royce. As he peered through the windows of the car, Michael Metelica, the

youthful leader of the Brotherhood of the Spirit, had much to be proud of. In a few brief years his group had grown from a handful of friends to a family of some 300 souls of all ages from many parts of the country. After several moves they had settled in Warwick, where they built a campus. Metelica's rock band, Spirit in Flesh, had achieved some measure of success, touring often, attracting sizable crowds and recording on a national label. His businesses included a theater, a recording studio, a bakery, a restaurant, a design company, a music store, a quarterly publication and an antique shop. To transport its members to work, the community was negotiating to buy a fleet of 35 cars.

As he told me later, in interviews related here, this era was the height of his achievement. "We had everything we could need," he said. Yet, as his life was ending in the winter of 2003, he was living alone, sick and unemployed, and far from whatever few acolytes and charmed domain remained from those times. It was a striking trajectory.

Brotherhood

The Brotherhood of the Spirit was the direct outgrowth of Michael Metelica's personal spiritual quest. In a series of conversations during the fall and winter of 2002–2003, he told me that as a troubled teenager, prone to violence and inattention at school, he had observed the transient qualities of friendship among his peers and decided during his high school years to focus his own efforts, by contrast, on the nurturing of groups and the support of individual identities—among them his own. In pursuit of these goals, and as a place in which he could act freely on his own principles, he built a tree house in 1968 near his home in Leyden, a rural farming community below the Vermont border, just north of Greenfield, Massachusetts. The tree house, still a fixture in local folklore, attracted a group of like-minded friends. During this period, 1967–1968, Metelica and his group experimented with cooperative ways of life, bartering farming, sugaring and other services for goods and rent.

Later in 1968 the tree house burned, the victim of some of Metelica's less like-minded friends. At the same time, the group began to grow. The combination sent the nascent community off to a series of rented or bartered houses. Their accumulated experiences, along with the attention the group had begun to attract, began to breed cohesion, and its size began to demand leadership. Before long, in part

due to the notoriety created by a 1968 article on the group in *True* magazine, some 20 young people were living in a tiny house in Charlemont, a town not far from Leyden. The young man perceived to be their leader was Michael Metelica (Collier).

According to Beth Hapgood, Metelica's longtime neighbor and friend, much of the original impetus to shape the Brotherhood of the Spirit originated in her house. Hapgood, an octogenarian graduate of Wellesley College who inclines toward the spiritual, moved to western Massachusetts with her husband in the early 1950s to raise a family. Among her children was a daughter to whom Michael Metelica later became much attracted. In the time he spent visiting her in the mid-1960s at the Hapgood house, at 88 Main Street in Northfield, Beth recalls, Michael was introduced to spiritual philosophy, poetry, meditation and additional tools that provided a welcome alternative to the troubles he experienced in other areas of his life.

At the time, Beth Hapgood reminded me, all of this was new. In her house, which she ran somewhat on the model of a commune before such alternative institutions gained wider popularity, she read to her extended family from Kahlil Gibran and Krishnamurti, and encouraged them to try meditation. Michael had never heard of any of these pillars of alternative life. In a later interview with Beth, recorded in her self-published book *88 Main Street*, Metelica acknowledged that these experiences had offered him the opportunity to make one of the key decisions of his life. "I always thought of myself as a survivalist," he said. "I wanted to be a real killer, or a real healer." At 88 Main Street, he continued, "I survived through a very critical period when I could have been extremely violent. . . . It was at 88 that the decision turned toward being a healer, and really caring about my actions" (Hapgood, *Main* 186–187).

Spirit

While Metelica was unfamiliar with the public formalities of spiritual life, he was no stranger to its private promptings. From an early age he had experienced visions, nightmares and esoteric insights that challenged, even hampered, his ability to view and live life in a normal manner. Hapgood feels that this is why school was so difficult for him. Metelica suggested to me later that a pharmacological solution to his difficulties might have been possible, had the drugs we have today been available. In either case, while Hapgood may have provided

a structure for his strong and unusual energy, its existence was something with which he was already familiar, for dealing with it was at the center of his life.

A guide in this rarefied supersensory realm arrived for Metelica through Beth in the form of the prominent psychic medium Elwood Babbitt. Babbitt was an older man, a local schoolbus driver and a subsistence farmer who, in a trance state, was able to perform personal readings and contact distant mythical and historical figures. Among the characters who appeared regularly in his "life readings" were Nostradamus, Mark Twain and Albert Einstein. A veteran of the spiritual life—of many lives, he would say—Elwood lived nearby, and he and Beth became close friends and collaborators in spiritual matters.

To Michael Metelica, Babbitt offered a model of a psychically free soul, a man living physically in a particular age—the present—but tied to, or liberated by, a much larger set of forces: history, energy, psychology, spirit. For Metelica, prey to dreams and visions, the disembodied continuum suggested by Babbitt seems to have offered needed context and meaning to his life. Through Babbitt, Metelica became aware that he had earlier been incarnated as—among others—Saint Peter and Robert E. Lee. Conversant with such exotic spiritual coordinates, he was well positioned to become an instant success among the largely lost and far less articulate young souls who were increasingly attracted to him and the Brotherhood, through rumor and news, as a source of direction and self-empowerment.

Metelica is prominently featured in two promotional films made by the Brotherhood in 1976 to extol its way of life to prospective recruits (Dudelheim). In these films, in a scene reminiscent of *Easy Rider*, he rides a Harley-Davidson, his band performs on tour to crowds of teenagers, the organization's businesses and daily life are illustrated and explained and he arrives on a tarmac to a group of enthusiastic brethren, emerging like a rock star from a private plane. A credit line introducing the films states proudly that all equipment seen in these movies is owned and operated by members of the Brotherhood.

The most striking scenes in the films are not, however, those of bravado or worldly success but the segments of Metelica addressing the regular meetings of the Brotherhood. These records of the group's informal gatherings to focus on meditation and spiritual values reveal nothing of the earlier troubled child he had been. Rather, they show a young man completely at ease with himself, speaking to a spellbound

audience in a natural flow of emotion and knowledge that is highly charismatic. His essential message in these talks is: I have brought myself to this state, and you can, too. For an outsider, this picture is also a matter for wonder: To one familiar with Metelica's story, his facility as an inspired public speaker is an astonishing transformation from the uncertainty, privacy, recalcitrance and pain that had gone before.

These abilities, according to Beth Hapgood, provided a natural vessel for his growing talent as a leader and guide. "People and music," she said to me on one of my recent visits to her house in Greenfield, "these were always the focus of his life. And always that unbounded energy to which people were attracted. He was a natural leader." Indeed, at this time, Metelica was radiant with energy and youth. Wiry, slim and endowed with long blond hair, he was a poster boy for the New Age.

Music

If you happened to live in the Northeast during the 1970s, Michael Metelica might have come directly to you. Through a booking agent he knew, his band Spirit in Flesh (later called simply Metelica, and finally Rapunzel) toured widely, especially in upstate New York. In 1971 they played Carnegie Hall. The band, like a number of others in professional music, was not a group of brothers or friends but individual musicians handpicked by Metelica to support him as a vocalist and to present the spiritually oriented music he wrote. As with other bands, personnel changed with some regularity, and it took many rehearsals with each succeeding group to bring Michael's ambitious repertoire up to the level of public performance. Still, engagements were fulfilled and albums were made. Those of a certain age may remember the brief period when New York's West Side Highway was plastered with posters touting the band's Carnegie Hall debut.

The life of the media star was one Metelica relished. At that point in his career, he was a high school dropout, with a following of adherents, living in rural Massachusetts and touring with his own band. As with other bands, for practical reasons, a bus was outfitted to facilitate their tours. Later, one of the successful businesses into which the Brotherhood ventured was the outfitting of touring buses for other musical groups.

The concerts, tours and attendant publicity served not only to further Metelica's desire for stardom but to advance the message and hone the abilities of the Brotherhood. As with other activities of the

group, they promoted collective planning and action, and encouraged the camaraderie for which the community became known throughout the region. In a 1997 article, 14-year group veteran Dan Brown describes the "impassioned, ecstatic, determined, frightfully intense" tone of life in the early days at the Brotherhood and on the road. "Everyone looked as if they were having the time of their lives," he recounts. "The air seemed charged," as well it might among a group that, espousing Metelica's message, believed it was "out to save the world" (Brown 2).

In a 1971 essay, Billy Rojas wrote of his first impressions of the group on the occasion of a concert by Metelica's band at the University of Massachusetts, in neighboring Amherst, in April 1970. After a dramatic musical invocation to the rebellious youth of the day, the volume rose louder and louder until "the doors on either side of the stage flew open with an audible crash. Into the hall burst some 50 or 60 people from the Brotherhood. They were jumping, singing, dancing—joyous. As they stormed the aisles, they reached out to the would-be spectators. Soon perhaps half of the audience had poured into the aisles and they and the communards were dancing together, dancing rhythmically, arms linked, or moving freely in improvised styles." "It is difficult to judge the emotions of hundreds of people," he continues, "but at the peak of the experience, many, possibly most of the participants experienced a sensation approaching euphoria" (Rojas 8).

Life at the Brotherhood

At this time, shortly after its inception, the Brotherhood needed to be housed and cared for. This led, in 1970, to the purchase of their first property, 40 acres in Warwick, and soon after to the building of a large dormitory, a practice studio for the band and other facilities for the housing and maintenance of a large group of people, including an impressive and comfortable home for their leader. To accomplish this, the Brotherhood of the Spirit shared experiences similar to those of many other alternative communities. Public inspectors had to be dealt with, and regulations for buildings, water and sewer met; matters such as ownership needed to be formalized and registered; crews for building and other tasks had to be organized and directed. Since the Brotherhood was a spiritual community, the responsibility for much of this tended to fall on the shoulders of its acknowledged leader and the small informal group of advisors, called the "core group," with whom he had worked since the days of the tree house.

One of the most onerous and well-publicized chapters in this phase of the organization's development occurred in the winter of 1971–1972 over the issue of welfare. With several hundred people living together, availing themselves of free public services, local and regional leaders finally took notice. A state regulation requiring welfare recipients living together to be of a single family was applied to members of the group. The Brotherhood fought back through lobbying. Eventually, a form of *détente* was reached.

This and other friction provoked not only sizable waves in the region but change within the Brotherhood itself. At some 300 people, it had become cumbersome and difficult to manage. As an alternative organization, it was large enough and sufficiently informally organized to be an easy target for outsiders. As a part of a larger community—strong community was one of Metelica's central beliefs—it was clearly not fitting in.

To his credit, Metelica took action. In 1973 he asked those who believed in him and the community to stay and anyone not interested in its fortunes and goals to leave. This modestly reduced the size of the group. Those who remained were required to get work—either find it or create it. With the funding accumulated through the donations of members and their families, buildings and housing were bought in Turners Falls to help provide employment and generate income for the group. (A condition of joining the Brotherhood was the pooling of all available personal resources. Metelica himself controlled the group's finances.) The effort also served the useful purpose of dispersing the members of the Brotherhood, making them a more difficult mark for assault by their critics.

The result resembled a bloodless New Age coup. Suddenly, the tiny declining town of Turners Falls, a few miles south of Warwick, where only a modest paper mill and numerous deserted shops remained as a reminder of its vigorous industrial past, became a mecca for musicians, believers, searchers, New Age hucksters and any number of other alternative types. New businesses opened, the local theater was restored and tie-dye—along with the Confederate ensign favored by Metelica, the former Robert E. Lee—became the clothing design du jour. With the growth of business, the coming and going of the band, the crowds at the group's weekly public meetings at the theater and other activity, Turners Falls took on a new vitality.

Separation

At this point in his life, however, their success notwithstanding, Michael Metelica might well have said, as did another commentator on the era, his former neighbor the countercultural writer Raymond Mungo: "This was not what I had in mind" (*Total Loss* 11). Metelica's role in this world, as Beth Hapgood firmly suggests, was not to run businesses and overly involve himself in the material realm. His gifts were spiritual, creative and charismatic. As the Brotherhood expanded—building, buying, trading, traveling, recording, counseling, feeding, heating—the many activities overseen by Metelica and his small core group grew. With that growth came the conflicts built into situations in which money, hierarchy, responsibility and management play a role. The way some community members saw it, Michael Metelica was too central to the Brotherhood for its own health, yet too involved in music and other personal pursuits to exert the control the organization needed to survive and grow. As Metelica saw it, he had to choose between music and community.

In the end, he had no choice. After thriving for some five years, from 1968 to 1973, as the head of a growing spiritual group, and another ten, 1973–1983, during which he was involved in both the community and its businesses and his own career in music, Metelica reached a parting of the ways with the Brotherhood. Eventually, he was forced out. Finances were an issue—the Brotherhood owed large amounts of money for health care and other material needs—as were matters of lifestyle. After 1972, drugs are said to have played a role, along with other expensive habits Metelica had developed.

David James, a journalist who has followed the history of the Brotherhood, said in a recent conversation, "I think it began with the band. I've heard that the introduction of new band members, outsiders, with their expectations of the style of life of touring musicians of the sixties and seventies, introduced divisions in the Brotherhood that were not easily healed. If you're eating tofu and beans, and the person next to you is eating steak, the difference is obvious" (Fels, Interviews).

Following Metelica's final departure in 1988, the community regrouped. A small portion of it still exists today on its Warwick property. Metelica himself interpreted the breakup as a signal to continue with his music, though without the financial and moral support he had enjoyed from the community he had founded. For years tensions between the former leader and the remaining group

continued to run high. At the time I interviewed him, Metelica still believed that those who had ousted him would eventually face atonement in the larger world of spirit.

When I asked Metelica, who in the early seventies had renamed himself Rapunzel, about those times, about what it was like to leave a life in which he was respected, relatively secure and all his needs were met, he answered with characteristic directness: "I just walked away from it." Indeed, there was little he could do. During the preceding ten years, when he had pursued both music and his role in the community, he had increasingly faced debilitating circumstances: the slings and arrows often directed to those who take it upon themselves to make decisions for others, the life of a musician on the road and, probably most important, the drug and alcohol use that had made him increasingly ineffective as a leader and a role model among his peers. Of the ten years that followed, the 1990s, he said only, "They were hell" (Fels, Interviews).

A Neighbor's Story

Back in the late 1960s and early 1970s, as a member of a nearby farm commune on which I lived for four years, I had heard some of these stories. The growth of the Brotherhood of the Spirit, the tree house, the summer in the southern Vermont woods, the dormitory, the purchase of properties in Turners Falls were surprising new elements in the local counterculture. I had read in the papers about the group's problems with the state: How was it, it was asked in Boston, that members of an organization whose leader drove a Rolls-Royce were on welfare?

By the late 1980s, though, news began to filter out that things at the Brotherhood had changed. Turners Falls returned more or less to normal. Brotherhood houses and businesses were sold and converted to other uses. Eventually, vague tales circulated that Michael Metelica was on the street, ill, and clearly without the resources he had once commanded. Recently, I thought I would see what had become of him. A few phone calls located him. He was happy to talk.

When I found Mike Metelica in the fall of 2002, he was living in a broken-down trailer in the woods of upstate New York. Surrounded by aging sound equipment, stacks of unwashed dishes and furniture that would probably have been rejected by the Salvation Army, he and a friend from Brotherhood days had carved out an existence in

the unlikely town of Cairo, not far from Woodstock. Along the rough dirt road to his house, playful painted elves populated the trees and a sign salvaged from a failed motel, no doubt meant to be humorous, added a confusing note of dislocation. Chickens and goats roamed the yard amid a collection of aging vehicles in varying states of disrepair; other trailers and cabins of equally uninspiring demeanor stood nearby. It was an astonishing change from the very substantial house that had been built for him in Warwick. In addition, he had been diagnosed earlier in the year with terminal cancer.

We talked about the lost years of the eighties and nineties and the tension of being forced out of the Brotherhood.

"Yeah, that's probably where the cancer came from," he said.

But, I wondered, how had he gotten to that point? When I asked him, he recounted the story in some detail.

"In high school," he said, beginning with the first strand of his tale, "you build relationships and then you don't see these people anymore. I couldn't understand that. It doesn't really matter why, it just really had an effect on me. So I've always been interested in what people really felt, what they really were. I felt like if given enough time, inevitably, anyone could come to an understanding—anyone.

"I always wanted to know what I was, what I really was: What was I really? I always felt very disconnected from my body. Before I could speak, I could understand English, and I knew exactly what people were saying. I remember trying to learn to talk and trying to get things to come out of my mouth and pronounce words. That was really hard. I knew what words meant before I could speak them, and I thought to myself, How am I ever going to be able to make my mouth go with what I'm thinking?"

"You have memories from that early?" I asked.

"Oh, I remember being born!" he said. "I remember being taken out of my mother, being brought into this world, and the frightening thing of being completely helpless, and wondering how I was going to be able to adjust to this body. That was all that occupied my mind, is how I would be able to adjust to my body, because it's like a big blob on you—it's like a big slow blob on you. You're totally helpless, you can't do anything yourself, you have to have the assistance of your mother. She takes care of making sure you can breathe. I remember lying in the bassinet, and my mother not placing me right, and sleeping and wondering if I was going to live through it, because I could barely breathe, the way she put me in there.

"Yeah, I remember everything when I was a kid. When I was three years old, I had a vision; I had it again when I was six. It was a vision of land rising and falling. I left my body, I left this blob and was able to see in a disconnected way this thing being shown to me. I saw it from a planetary standpoint, from being away from the planet. I went to my mother's room and I said, 'Mom, the world, I saw the world!' I remember running down the hallway to tell her that I'd seen this thing, because it was so incredible, because it was like I was completely free and clear of my body and able to see this thing. I knew it really had a lot of importance. But I couldn't express it, and she just went back to bed.

"So I knew there was something beyond just living and going to school. A lot of things that I was being taught didn't match what I felt I was supposed to learn. That's why I felt like the significance of people and groups was more important—this scenario of why I was placed with these people and what my purpose was with them.

"At that point, I was acting out. At that time, the 'stubborn child' was in, and reform school and all that stuff, if you didn't obey. So my mother sent me to my uncle, who was in the Army."

For a year Metelica lived at Fort Leavenworth, in Kansas. He went to the base school and for the first time met blacks and the international families of servicemen. Still, he continued to be different.

"I went to Teen Club and they'd beat me up," he said, "come to me and smack me in the face because I'd be hanging out with the black people. But I said to my black friends, 'Look, I don't care what they think; they're not going to come after you, anyway, they're going to come after me, so what difference does it make?' It was an education. I saw that black people were treated differently. I was noticeable at that time, I was definitely noticeable, wherever I was."

Turning Point

"At 16 I left home," Michael continued, "and went to California." He had been attracted to the Hell's Angels, which he perceived as a communal organization, only to find it violent and unsavory. "I crossed the country and eventually joined the hippies. That movement was pretty cool. In 1966 and 1967, that movement was intact. There were people out there really believing in this peace-and-love thing. Drugs were definitely a part of it. I involved myself in that, I thought that was pretty intense. But then I came back and I said, 'I'd like to finally

just see if I can do something on my own principles.' So I built the tree house. I had a bunch of friends from different places around the area, and I had my friends from high school who knew I was doing this.

"I asked this farmer—he had about 1500 acres—if I could live on his land, on Blueberry Hill, in Leyden, and work for him in exchange. I wanted to prove that you could do something for nothing, not always getting something in return for what you do, which is still an issue with me. You know, getting paid for everything you do, that's not the way it should be. I'd prefer to do something for someone to take a weight off their back, not to make them have to pay for it."

As Michael described it, a group grew around the tree house and then reached a critical point.

"The girl I was going with, she liked the idea, and she used to come and visit me at the tree house, and then some of my high school friends came. Some of them were living in the street, anyway, in Greenfield, you know, doing drugs and hanging out in the street all day, so they came and joined me, they went to work with me. So it grew. It never was an intentional community in the beginning. It just grew to, like, seven people.

"But then this girl came that I'd met in Boston. We used to get drugs from her. Methadrine was her thing. She came to visit this guy that used to shoot speed with her. She didn't like me at all. She had been picking blueberries in Canada and she was on her way back to Boston. She was gone so far into it, that's why she went up to Canada, to try to get away from it. My buddy who did drugs with her told me she'd inevitably just go right back to the same thing. It was a matter of her either staying or going back and doing drugs—she'd probably kill herself.

"She didn't like me. She liked the place, though, and I could see in a week that her skin was looking better. There was a lightness about her, and a change that was significant. And at that point I had to decide. She wanted to stay, but she couldn't stand me. So I had to decide whether—this was the turning point—whether this was going to be a community, this was actually going to be a project, because that became apparent. If I were going to take people in who didn't like me, because I knew it was helping them, and that'd be the only reason I'm doing it, then it had to be something bigger than just what we were, and that was a group of people that really liked each other, basically got along: We were friends.

"That was the turning point, that was the turning point of the whole thing. That's when I realized it could be something bigger, something that could affect people, change them, help them. Because I knew if she went back to Boston, she'd probably die."

Elwood

Over that summer of 1968, Metelica's group continued to work for the farmer who had originally taken them in. But by fall the group had grown larger, and Metelica accepted an offer of winter housing in a nearby town in exchange for the work of sugaring its adjoining land in the spring. During this first winter, some 28 young people inhabited a small farmhouse in Charlemont, Massachusetts, moving later in the winter to the nearby town of Heath.

It was about this time that Metelica met Elwood Babbitt.

"He was a seer," Metelica told me, "a trance medium like Edgar Cayce. He was like a guru to me. I met him through my girlfriend's mother [Beth]. She was an associate professor at the local community college. Elwood convinced me through my own experience. He told me of this knowledge that would be available to me as a result of something I was seeing, if I would pursue it. Here's this guy that reads auras, who does readings. I thought it might be worth checking out. I had no idea what was going on except that it sounded really intriguing. There are auras around us that he could read. He said that we had previous lifetimes, and you could read what a person's state of existence was. That was right up my alley; that intrigued me.

"Well, I had this purplish-pink thing that used to appear to me in my bed before I'd go to sleep. It wasn't very big. It had color. Elwood said it was an emanation of a previous lifetime and that if I let myself go, it would totally envelop me and I would go out and experience a previous lifetime. So I let this thing get bigger and bigger, and eventually it swallowed my head, and I was flying forward out of my body above the ocean. On a beach I saw three men talking. I went into the body of one of them. I was about seven feet tall, I had black hair. I was a revolutionary, but I was also part of the government, I was a traitor to them. It turned out that there was this huge tidal wave that came in when I went into the body, this huge tidal wave, like a mile high. We were all scared.

"The thing was, it was the same tidal wave I used to have nightmares about. Every time my mother and father had a party, I'd

get sick. I would puke and I'd get diarrhea, and I would have the same recurring dream. So when I saw it this time, I said, 'Oh, my God! That thing I've been dreaming all my life!' There was also a fear of water involved; ever since that dream, I've never had that fear anymore.

"So I was convinced about Elwood, because nobody could make up this thing, it was so—so terrifying to me. He didn't know that specific story, but he knew that if I let this pinkish thing expand I would experience a previous lifetime. When I used to have these dreams, I'd forget about them. I didn't want to remember. But every time they had a party, it would happen. If you are terrified enough of something, you'll totally blot it out of your mind. This experience brought it back, and I said, 'Oh, my God, this is the thing'—it gnaws at me. I used to wake up and I couldn't remember the dream; now I remembered it. That's the thing that did it, that tidal wave.

"Anyway, that solved a lot of problems. That was the first experience I had with previous lives, and I was totally convinced. It had nothing to do with proving it to anyone else, it had to do with the fact that no one could make it up."

From Metelica's contact with the trance medium Elwood Babbitt and with Beth Hapgood, who was working with him, evolved most of the central beliefs that came to be held by the Brotherhood of the Spirit and promulgated publicly by Metelica and his adherents. In large part these were based on a series of trance lectures offered by Babbitt in the winter of 1967–1968, which were recorded and privately published for use by the community as *Wanted: The Good and the Godly*. In 1970, these texts were amplified in Babbitt's *Conversations with Vishnu*. A selection of both of these was reprinted in 1997 as a part of Hapgood's *Dare the Vision*. Additional inspiration was found in Levi's *The Aquarian Gospel*, a classic of alternative spiritual culture of the time.

The principal themes of *Wanted: The Good and the Godly*, revealed through Babbitt by a spirit named Kishamet, echo those of both the spiritualist tradition from which they arose and the turbulent times in which they arrived. Among those adopted by Metelica and then the Brotherhood were the belief that the world had reached a high state of corruption, as evidenced especially in its devotion to materialism; that civility and mutual respect had broken down, particularly toward the young; and that coming cataclysmic changes on the planet would force momentous rearrangements of society. The solution, as Metelica encouraged his followers to see, was to break with history, live in self-

sufficient separation and, by focusing on eternal, spiritual values, use positive energy to work toward the creation of a new renaissance in human affairs. "Our purpose," says Kishamet in *Wanted: The Good and the Godly*, "is to help those who seek, yet do not understand, as well as . . . those believing in the antiquated creeds that so long ago brought no answers." The tools for this, adds Billy Rojas, included recognition of "the authentic powers of the mind, powers to heal oneself and others and to communicate across space and time"—abilities attributed by many of his followers to Michael Metelica, and which he in turn encouraged in them (5–6).

In addition, other themes prevalent in the sixties and seventies were evident in the beliefs of the Brotherhood. Among them were the importance of creativity; peace, love, friendship and trust; living in nature; and a more diffuse but influential attention to such purported phenomena as vibrations and reincarnation.

A New Home

After their winter in Heath, where they had moved following a disagreement with the owner of the farmhouse in Charlemont, the community relocated once again, this time to land adjoining a small primitive alternative community living in tepees and shacks on a meadow in Guilford, Vermont, not far from Metelica's home in Leyden. They built essential shelter and survived, for the summer of 1969, largely outdoors. In the fall, with the community now numbering almost 80, Metelica arranged to return to Heath, where they were given the use of a summer camp for the winter. As had become his way, Metelica asked only those who believed in him and the mission of the group to go with him; all but four did.

"So we spent the winter up there," he said, "80 of us crammed into a place twice as wide and about as long as this trailer. At the end of the winter, early in 1970, I said, 'Look, you got any trust funds or anything like that?' I said, 'Why don't you see what we can come up with for money and we'll buy a place.' So these two older women who had joined the community—they were in their 40s—they posed as the buyers. We pulled together \$20,000 and put it down, and after a long struggle, a lot of suspicion and communication breakdown, we got this place in Warwick. It was, like, 15 acres, and it had been a club, 98-person capacity, though in no way would it ever pass for that. It

didn't have a sewer system or anything, but it was still legal. So we started there. We built this huge building and that's where the thing sort of came together. About a year from that point, we had 250 people. Later we split up and started buying places. We got off welfare—we got that law passed. We had a lot of fights with the town about the water and the sewer tests, but we managed to pass them all.

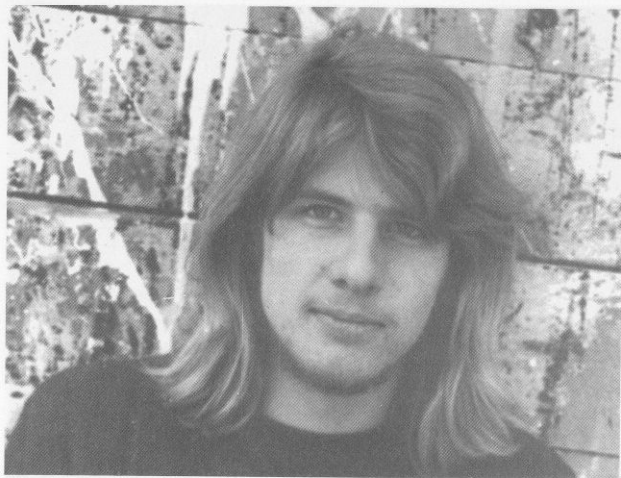
"That was when the band started—Spirit in Flesh. This woman came up and visited a friend of mine and I put this makeshift band together. I always had bands in high school, I always had a band here or there, I was singing, anyway. This woman came up and said, 'I really believe you can be somebody.' She heard me sing and play. She was in music. She had a hit out in the sixties, and she married a millionaire. She was visiting a friend up in Massachusetts, and she just fell in love with what she thought I could be. She just happened to really like my voice, and thought I was going to be someone; it was that ridiculous. So that's how the band got started."

"But then you really pursued it," I prompted him. I remembered the sudden emergence of a music scene in Turners Falls. "You had equipment and everything else you needed."

"Yeah, yeah," he said, "because where there's people, there's always going to be money. The members brought money, too. It was coming in all the time. Basically, if you joined, you were joining the group, and whatever you had you would contribute to the group. It was up to you to be honest; no one was going to pursue you to find out what you had."

"That band lasted about three years. We played Carnegie Hall. Filled it. We put posters all over New York City. We plastered the West Side Highway. Our people went down there and got on top of the van, and put a ladder on top of that, and got up there and put up posters. It was a big, big, big thing. Those guys did that in one night. There was a lawsuit against us, and whatever. Big controversy."

"I was in Europe in 1970," I said. "I remember there were posters there." I remembered other incidents from that era as well. There had been a guerrilla effort at promotional tactics that included not only posters and handbills throughout the country, and a march in New York, but organized mass disruptions of the television shows of Dick Cavett and Johnny Carson. At the same time, they were attracting the journalistic attention of *60 Minutes* and David Frost. As Dan Brown quotes from *The Village Voice* in 1971, one of the group's many reviews

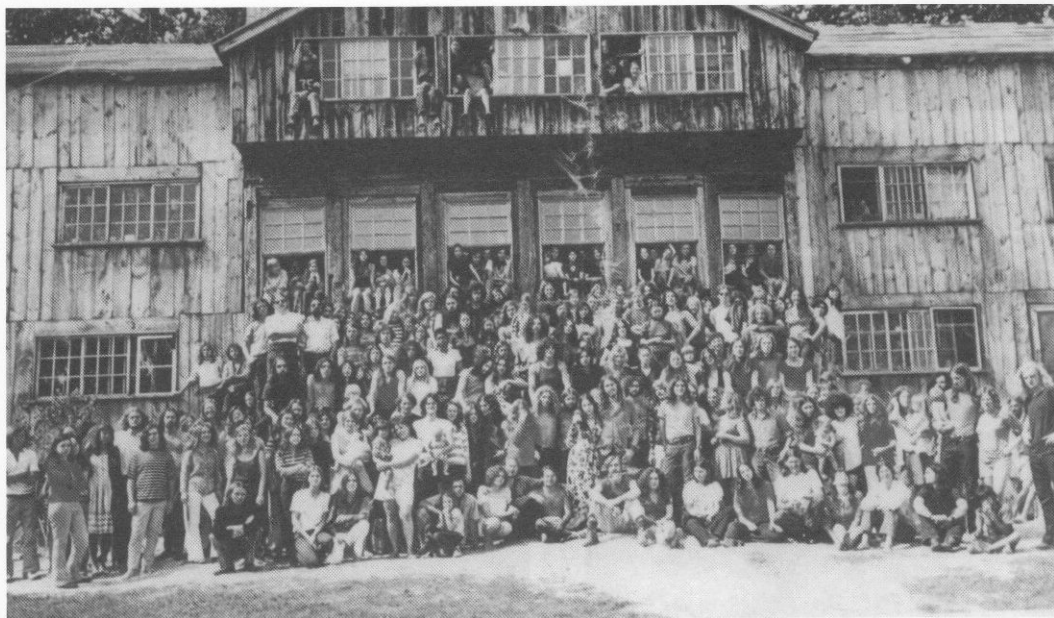


Michael Metelica, c.1969



Early homes of the Brotherhood of the Spirit, Leyden, MA, 1969

Except where noted, photos courtesy of Elizabeth Hapgood Papers, Special Collections, W.E.B. DuBois Library, University of Massachusetts, Amherst.



Dormitory built by Brotherhood, c.1972



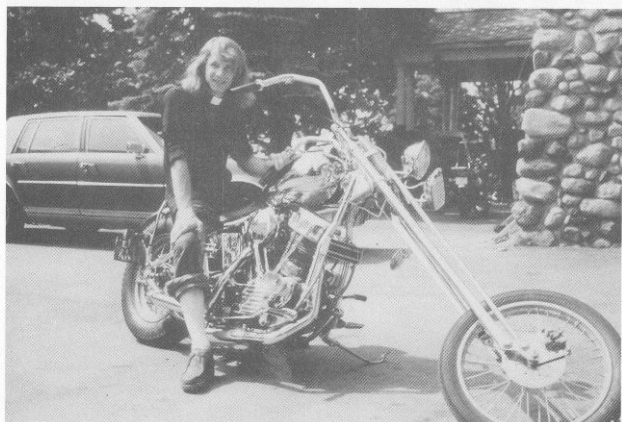
Michael Metelica in his original treehouse, 1968



Michael Metelica, Beth Hapgood and others meeting at Beth's house, 88 Main Street, Northfield, MA, c.1969



Elwood Babbitt and family, c.1965



Michael Metelica on cycle, c.1972



Michael Metelica performing double marriage at Brotherhood, c.1973



Michael Metelica, Cairo, NY, 2002

that mix annoyance with admiration: “‘These morons are production geniuses’” (*Chronological History* 1).

“Right. Right. Right. Yeah,” continued Michael, speaking of the posters. “But that band never was—well, it was, like, me. I had to run the whole thing. It was like, if I didn’t motivate it, there was nothing there. It wasn’t a band by itself. It played music, but I didn’t feel included. So inevitably it just fell apart.

“A little later, I put together another band. We had a music store, and it attracted some good musicians. I practiced with them for at least eight hours a night for, like, six months. Then we went out and played. We were drawing, like, 2000 to 9000 people in no time. We would rent a park, we’d get a permit for two nights. The first time we played, we’d draw, like, a hundred, 150 people. The next time it would be, like, 500 to 600 people, and then the next time we played there’d be thousands of people. It was quite the thing. We did all upstate New York, all this area.

“That was a total success. The band quit because they were getting scared. It was becoming a real phenomenon. But it was great. I proved I could do something if I had the right people working with me, people that really wanted to work with me. I was happy with that. Let it go at that.”

Expansion and Change

Between tours, however, all was not great.

“At this point, we had already built a huge dormitory,” he recalled. “We had 300 people the second year at Warwick, and we decided to spread out. We bought houses in town so there would be diversity, and there wouldn’t be one single target. But in 1973 I came back from California after doing an album and I said to the people, I said, ‘Look, every time I leave, the whole thing falls into arguing. The core group can’t get along, and that’s who I left in charge.’ So I said, ‘Either I’m quitting the band or I’m going to pursue the music and you can do your own thing, you can have this place and you guys can work it out. I don’t care. I’ve got a future. But if you want to stay here with me, I’m going to be like a dictator and you are going to do what I say.’ We were, like, \$3000 a week in debt, practically. We were going into the red and we needed to do something. We had a lot of people. It don’t take very much to get into debt—debts mounting up and no way to pay them. Hospital bills. We had, like, 20 or 30 grand in hospital bills—

I don't remember exactly—and they come after the group. You always got people coming after you.

"So I said, 'You have two weeks to think about this, because this isn't going to be no joke.' I projected the worst on them, the worst I possibly could. I wanted to let them know it wasn't going to be no party if they chose me. After two weeks, they all agreed, so I said, 'Okay, everybody is going to work. Everybody who possibly can is going to get a job. And those that can't get one are going to help people get to work and things like that.'

"Well, we went to work. We bought houses in Turners Falls. We bought a whole block in Turners Falls, the main block in town. That's where we started getting creative. We bought, like, three more houses over the course of a year. In 1976 we bought 80 more acres in Gill. In 1973 I had changed the name of the community to Metelica's Aquarian Concept—a new corporation. I wrote up this 60-page thing, questions—you had to answer them right, basically, to become a prospective member, and you had to stay at the place a couple weeks or a month. Because if you became a member, you were committing yourself to the group. Right or wrong, you would contribute to the group, which was through me, and I would decide what direction we were going to go. I had a core group I listened to. A lot of those people were original members, but there were also people who came in that were, I felt, worthy of—who had experience in different areas of working with people, and so I used them to make decisions, too, about what we would do next. So we started all these different businesses and things. We made two documentary films on this."

He suggested I borrow them, and I did.

"Great," he said. "You'll see everything, 'cause everything is in them."

Matters of Life and Death

"So I went on with the music," he said. "I made a couple of albums, one I'm just going to put out now. It's a country album I made. I used various musicians that I had available to me at the time.

"I've got somebody that can shop it around for me. I've just got to get it out there. Since I got this cancer thing, if I feel too tired, I don't do it. It's slowing the process. But I've got everything basically all together. I put it on CD. I'll play you a couple songs from it."

As he put on the CD, he returned to our conversation.

"At the Brotherhood," he continued, "they wanted to settle down. We bought the 80 acres in Gill, in a real nice country setting, and we

formed the Renaissance Community. We were granted official church status by the IRS. But eventually they overrode me. They didn't want to do what I wanted to do anymore, so I basically split and went through a ten-year depression.

"Since I got cancer I got well over 200 phone calls, all my enemies from those days calling and saying they really love me. I knew it anyway."

"Still," I said, "when you got sick, I would think that would have changed things, that you would look at everything through new eyes."

"Well," he said, "it's a continuation. I believe I'll just be walking into the next room. I'm not afraid of dying at all. It's a question of whether I have a purpose here, still. I'm one little speck on this planet, I mean, being this little nothing. If they need me, I'm on the floor, you know, I'm all for sticking around. I'm all for doing whatever I have to do to get better, within reason. But I'm not going to take all this radiation treatment and stuff like that. I'm not doing that. I'll take chemotherapy to a certain degree, which I'm doing now. It's working well enough—at least the pain is not so intense as it was. It's no fun, this stuff, to say the least."

After he adjusted the sound equipment, two very loud songs came through: "Something Greater than Man" and "There Exists a Fine Line." The songs had overtly religious and existential themes.

"I hear some Johnny Cash," I said.

"Yeah, people say that," he replied. "Not really. Nothing influenced me."

I had heard that when she had first found out that he was ill, Beth Hapgood had organized a great celebration of Michael for relatives and friends, not knowing whether he would live long enough to attend.

"Did you make it to that get-together in Greenfield last summer?" I asked.

"Oh, yeah, I went to my own funeral," he said. "Of course!" He laughed. "That was fun."

"When you see these people," I asked, "when you look back on the things you've done, what is it that sticks with you?"

"The whole thing that I conclusively came to," he said, "is I believe we are living in a time where—going back to that vision at three years old—we're going into a time where there's going to be some sort of astral shift, some sort of a major change in the planet that's going to affect us. We are going to have to make a move. At that point, groups

will form, barter systems will come into being, because things are not going to be easy to get anymore. I believe we're going into a time that—when Bush rings the bell over there in Iraq”—this was shortly before the recent war—“he's going to set off some things at home that he wished he hadn't. Because there is going to be so much to take care of here. California is supposed to fall into the sea. There's some kind of a major electromagnetic planetary thing that exists in Florida; something to do with the balance of the planet comes out of there. That's where you got the Bermuda Triangle. Something to do with our planetary thing, magnetism or whatever—so Florida is going to get hit, too.

“And there's another message. People have to realize that God needs to come into their life. They need to look to outer forces for strength, not just face their problems head-on, physically. If they open the door, they can make things happen. With all the hypocrisy in the world today, you need guidance to get through.”

I asked if the way we had all lived back then offered a model for the new era he foresaw.

“Well,” he said, “the sixties themselves were a change. Now we're in, like, a paradigm, you know? It's like it just changed again. We're keeping up with it. It's like: ‘Peace and love, yeah, that's the way to go.’ It's like we already knew. We just woke up and we knew when that was being said, when that became an anthem, that it was the one to follow. That's the same kind of paradigm that we're in now, finally. The eighties and nineties: Don't ask me what they were about—just a terrible, terrible time.”

“Well,” I responded, “I think one of the questions that people from our era are curious about is: We all knew about that paradigm, and yet the world seems to have gone back the other way. What was that all about?”

“Good question. At least now we've gone back to the sixties, we're not in the fifties. We've definitely been through a cleansing process. Everybody knows where they are at. If you are a villain, you know you are a villain, and you accept it. If you really don't want to be one, then you've already decided that, too.

“That's what's happening to us, because everyone I know, that I've talked to since I got sick, we've all been through the same thing, a really traumatic cleansing process, terrible times, wondering a lot about ourselves but having to swim alone. It's like you are so preoccupied trying to keep afloat yourself, you really couldn't do a damn thing to help anybody else.

"Now we're coming out of that, we're getting a little bit more freedom to look around and begin to communicate again. I believe we'll find that—it's something to do with this whole thing that Bush is doing with Iraq. That's going to open it up. As things become really apparent, that we're in a real dilemma, then people will pull together. We already know what the problem is, the problem is very clear. We have a basis to communicate again, to begin our communication, and we're going to find out that we all feel a lot alike. That will set the whole thing off."

"So, looking back," I said, "the tree house, the Brotherhood, Turners Falls, the band—these are all things that promoted use of your energy, and you just continue to do that."

"Have to, yeah. As long as I'm here, I'm going to try to make the most of it. But what I'm constantly being told in this situation, and it's very, very clear, is: 'Look, slow down, keep a focus. Keep an awareness of what you want to do. Keep your goals, but you are going to do it slowly.' I'm forced to do that. I mean, if I get real sick, I'm in the bed and I can't do anything, and that's it for the day. So for me, and I believe it's probably true for everybody else, the key is focus. Be aware of what you are doing, but do it slowly. It's refreshing. This whole thing that something has got to get done at a given time, or that you've got to do something so you can get to the next thing—that picture is out. That way of doing things is gone. That's a hard one for me, it really is. It doesn't care how slow, it just says, 'Slow, slow.'"

I asked about his medical care.

"I've got the best doctors you can get. I told them what I want and what I don't want. They're listening. I said, 'It's not a matter of me dying; I'm not afraid of that, if you think just keeping me living is what I want.' No, I don't want to live a painful existence. If I have to go through a lot of pain, I'd rather be in the next dimension. I'm not afraid to die. I've done a lot that I wanted to do. I don't feel I'm going to end up very dissatisfied, feeling that I did wrong to other people. I don't feel I have."

"Obviously, when you get close to death, and your body is telling you that, you really do scrutinize yourself. You take a good look: What do I lack? What didn't I do? I don't have that problem. I feel I treated everybody fair. I did the best I could with what I had, what I knew, and that's all you can do."

Another Side of the Story

Over the next few months, over the winter of 2002–2003, I visited with Metelica. We would talk, and he would share what he was up to: building a painting studio, working on his CD, fixing some piece of furniture, raising tiny goats to carry hikers' packs. To me, he always seemed remarkably active and strong for someone seriously ill, but over a period of time, he confessed to slowing down a bit. It was, after all, more than half a year beyond what he had called his own funeral.

For him, death was part of a much larger continuum.

"Oh, yeah, I feel like I've already died and went through the tunnel before," he said, referring to an experience in an automobile accident. "I've reviewed my life, so I already know how I feel even in spirit. It's like walking from one room into the next, that's all it is. There's no fantastic thing about it. You're totally conscious; the only difference is you have nothing binding you to the earth any longer."

I knew from earlier conversations that Michael could look back in detail on his lifetime. I asked if he could look back into other lifetimes, or ahead.

"Oh, you can look into past lifetimes," he said "The future is a little different, it's projected. If we hold a conviction that's very strong, it will impress itself on our future direction. That's what a gypsy is reading, or a psychic: the intentions that are projected through your soul as to what you probably will do, your convictions."

Convictions were certainly Michael's strong suit. From the beginning, the Brotherhood had provoked a strongly mixed response. Some believed Michael to be a visionary, while others thought him crazy, misguided and highly manipulative, even a charlatan. The role of New Age spiritual executive he had adopted set him beyond the place where he might ask for help.

I reminded him that he had been aware of this higher world from early on.

"Yes," he said, "but until I met Beth and Elwood, I thought everyone was going through the same thing. At the time, I felt my consciousness was developed, but you know, I don't feel I've really grown since I've been 15 years old. I don't really feel like I've been challenged by anything new. Everything I've experienced was something that I already knew. I haven't really had any surprises."

I tried to imagine living in this sort of world. I couldn't. But when I looked at the life he had created for himself, his remarks did make some

sense. The crazy place, the trailer, the deer head on the wall, the mirrors, the sound equipment, the computer games, the music, the *Playboy* magazines, the elves in the trees: When he said he hadn't grown since he was 15, I thought that was actually a pretty good description of his state of mind.

Of course, to someone like Michael Metelica, the material realm is irrelevant. What he had said helped me understand something I had been wondering about spiritually and artistically involved people: Why did I always find them in trailers, in the woods, at the edge of cliffs, in grotty apartments, on worn-out sofas in end-of-the-road clothes? To be frank: They don't care. They answer to different forces; matters such as appearance and comfort don't count.

To others, though, they do count, and the accounts of other commentators concerning the growth and progress of both Michael and the Brotherhood sound quite different from his own.

In the 1997 book *Communal Organization and Social Transition*, a thorough study by sociologist Barry Laffan, a rather unflattering image of Michael and his compatriots emerges. Beginning in the spring of 1970, as part of his graduate work, Laffan lived as a participant-observer in a neighboring commune. Though acknowledging the Brotherhood's strong early emphasis on group solidarity and individual honesty, Laffan records an increasingly strident, partisan tone in its activities, a strong inclination toward heavy-handed manipulation of members by their leaders and something that sounds as much like expediency as spiritual principle in the ordering of the group's affairs. In Laffan's view, Michael and his lieutenants leveraged group yearnings into collective dependency and translated their own taste for feats of daring into a series of daunting tasks billed as initiation but more accurately serving as a kind of humbling exposure for the initiate. To Laffan, the Brotherhood seemed to believe it had "an answer for everything." Its self-serving qualities, he notes, often led it to be excluded by other more public-spirited alternative communities. "They were pigs!" a member of Laffan's sixties commune said to me recently. "I couldn't understand; why would you want to follow someone like that?" (Laffan).

Among the key figures in Laffan's study is Roy, a lieutenant of Michael's from his core group who had directorial duties during their stay in Guilford, Vermont. Roy, with whom I later spoke, is an intriguing figure, an aspiring leader blocked from attaining that goal by a combination of ego conflict with Michael and aspects of his own personality. Today he makes his

living as a craftsman and builder, though he is still much involved in the spiritual life, as he was 30 years ago, even before joining the Brotherhood of the Spirit. Having become connected to the group at its earliest, most spiritually oriented stage, he was affronted by its move into more personal and material concerns: rock music, real estate, retail business. As the group and its leader developed more strongly in these directions, he chose to leave. He sees succeeding waves of difficulties in the Brotherhood largely as further outgrowths of its original abandonment of spiritual principles. Many others do as well.

A closer look, and my talks with Michael, led me to think that the picture was more complex. Even in its early days, when Roy first joined, the group that would become the Brotherhood had involved itself in risky, high-stakes, physically and psychologically extreme behavior, and later continued to accept it from its leader. For a group that propounded abstinence in drug use and sex, there seemed to be a lot of both. For a communal effort striving to live in peace and love, its history revealed a remarkable number of crises, including striking moments of interpersonal and societal conflict, devastating fires and even murder. (In a crime that has never been solved, Peter Lubin, a member of the Brotherhood, was killed, probably by vigilantes, while hitchhiking along a local highway.) When I explored the role of drug use with Michael, his response was that if used correctly, drugs were an aid to creativity. Citing time in the studio with Peter, Paul and Mary and other groups in which joints and lines of coke were set out regularly on the amps (puffing "the magic dragon"), he said simply, "Drugs and music go together." A counselor to others on central issues in their lives, he himself, I noted, had six children by six different women.

In later days, life at the community was increasingly chaotic. Dan Brown recounts that in 1973 alone, Metelica appropriated the wedding gifts of a member couple to buy himself a sports car; vigilantes murdered Lubin and committed other acts against the group (their cars were regularly run off the road); and an odd set of marches in nearby towns in November 1983 repelled rather than attracted supporters. In addition, Metelica changed his name to Rapunzel and took to appearing in the costume of a transvestite elf. During the same year, he had the first of several serious automobile accidents. In the course of all this, he had time to devise a new caste system whereby community members lived in separate houses according to their estimated level of spiritual

awareness and were identified as such by different-colored sweaters: white, maroon and brown. (This was reportedly very divisive.) Members of the community were also encouraged to learn German and French, as plans were being considered to move the entire group to Europe.

Demons and Dreams

In light of this varied picture, I had to ask myself what this was all about: the man, the commune, the followers, the spiritual beliefs—the life of this self-declared prophet. To some extent, it appeared to me to be substantially a question of psychology. In a 1975 film about Metelica's mentor Elwood Babbitt, *Voices of Spirit*, Babbitt's mother relates that her son, when young, had exhibited a split personality "like Dr. Jeckyll and Mr. Hyde"—similar, I would guess, to Michael's (Keller).

In another sphere, the confluence of forces surrounding the 1960s certainly played a role. This era provided the spiritual background, climate for social change, freedom of movement and free-flowing resources that allowed the Brotherhood to take shape as a larger organization. At one point, the income of the Brotherhood was estimated at \$10,000 a week. According to Brown, after the group's return to work in 1973, the piles of dollar bills in the group's—Metelica's—"money room" reached up to his chest (Brown, *Fine Line* 7).

It also seemed to have had something to do with the process of growing up. While hundreds, perhaps thousands, of young people had passed through the Brotherhood and the Renaissance Community and benefited from it, over the 20 years Michael was involved, his own life had somehow been allowed to be put on hold while he played out the public role that was expected of him. The price he paid for living out his private life in public was, in part, the neglect of his own personal health and growth.

The result was a set of immense contradictions. While Michael blithely saw Carnegie Hall as full, others reported it only half full, with the audience comprised largely of the Brotherhood and its friends. The cataclysms he foresaw as harbingers of a new age were countercultural news more than 30 years old. His dreams and nightmares bespoke problems of this world more than another. His fantasies, real and moving to him, had a self-fulfilling Disney or Peter Pan-like quality redolent of the sixties. Things do come true, after all, if we make them. When he had crossed the country at 16 to visit California,

the car trip was marred by mechanical troubles. How was it that someone who believed he could see into the future and the past couldn't tell that his own automobile needed to be fixed?

But such examples were minor infringements. It was Metelica's devolution from mentor to a painful hell of drug use, debt, snarling dogs and guns that provided the unexpected denouement to his highly successful career as a spiritual leader. (It was Metelica's insistence on building a firing range at the community in 1983 that finally convinced Brown that he had to leave. His living quarters at the time were seen by some members as a sort of "Alamo," a last, armed stand against a hostile world.) The irony was, as Beth Hapgood pointed out, that while Michael was in part of his life a finely tuned spiritual leader—and for her a hero of the era—he was in another part just a normal person. "Like everyone else," she said, "he got caught up in those times" (Fels, Interviews).

In the end, I thought that what happened to Michael Metelica was something not at all uncommon. There are any number of examples in our current era alone—people caught up in escaping their past, in buying themselves out of their failings, leaders turned victims of events that have mounted beyond their control. At dark moments, members like Dan Brown see that their experience could well have taken a turn similar to those of the followers of other gurus of their time: Charles Manson, Jim Jones, David Koresh.

Such figures often have positive attributes in common as well: the skills that have gotten them where they are. They are inspirational, and creative directors of people and resources. They are willing to adapt to circumstances. When I looked at Michael's life, I saw an astonishing array of roles and a wide range of failure and success. Looking through Beth's photo albums, I saw Michael as a charismatic leader (speaking in a crowded church), minister (marrying a couple, wearing a clerical collar) and rock musician (wild onstage). He was also a counselor and parental figure to those at the Brotherhood, as well as the youthful cutup of his earlier years, an identity that continued to surface from time to time. At other points he was politician, entrepreneur, strategist, diplomat, corporate president and friend.

This was a large number of mantles for a young man to carry, one who never finished high school and whose principal occupations were farmer, mystic and musician. But, as I continued to visit, I found that he really hadn't changed. At Cairo, he was building facilities for a new community that he hoped would succeed him. He continued to talk

about his paradigm for a new New Age, drawn from the sixties, which he believed was on the verge of arriving. "We're the bohemians of the next change," he said, a colorful but largely correct description of how such movements progress. He asked me to visit again the next summer, but I wondered if the future he pictured with such confidence might be only a dream.

He was still committed, he was not giving up—and he was still capable of a surprise.

"You know," he said to me one day in the early winter of 2003, "I'd like to take something as far as you can take it, develop a whole new community, take it to a higher level. I feel like I want, I still would like—I'd love to run the Philippines," he announced.

I was astonished. "Really? Why?" I asked. "Do you think they need help?"

"Of course they need help!" he said. "With all the poor people, how can they not need help? I'd like to show people what could be done. I'd like to be the leader, the president of a country. I'm not going to do it, I can't do it, but I'd like to."

He had a plan: New casinos would produce profit that would be used to help the poor.

"That's what I would do. Introduce sharing: show that you could live. I'd bring the whole thing up to where everybody was happy, everybody was able to be taken care of, then we'd get into the spiritual thing."

The contradictions were also still on display.

"We'd have a Havana there, like the Mafia did," he went on.

"That doesn't bother you?" I asked. "Gambling, prostitution? You wouldn't try to control that aspect of it?"

"No, no. The only thing is, there can't be lots of murders and all that.

"When I say I'd like to be in leadership of the Philippine Islands, to turn that around, I know what I'm dealing with. I know I could do this and do it well, because of my experience in the past. Large numbers of people, even a million, that's not out of my realm. That's the way I feel. You can't make that up, either, 'cause there are times when you think about—when you feel weak and think of something like that that you'd like to do. It seems impossible, and you wonder, 'How can I think that?' you know, 'cause it's, like, so overwhelming, what you're actually dealing with. If I felt like that on a regular basis, then I wouldn't even think of doing such a thing. But I don't. I feel like on a regular basis I could do that."

And I think he did believe that he could.

"I have a drive within me to add dimension, add enlightenment, add to the vitality of a generation coming up," he had said to the assembled Brotherhood in one of the videos I had borrowed (Dudelheim).

I didn't want to be the one to tell him that the Philippines is made up of more than 70 million people spread over 7000 islands. I did go so far as to say that I thought he would need a boat, or perhaps the plane of his Brotherhood days. He laughed. But before we could pursue the conversation any further, I got the call from Beth: He was recalled to the world of spirit. He had passed through the final door. If I wanted to speak with him, I would have to wait till our next encounter.

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Nathaniel Hawthorne as Art Critic: The Italian Experience and *The Marble Faun*

By Tony Gengareilly

As a recent trip I took to Italy confirmed, the land of art and fine cuisine has become one of the premier tourist attractions on the globe. This love of the Italian peninsula is not a recent phenomenon, however. Following the Renaissance, Italy became an essential stop on the Grand Tour undertaken by sons of the wealthy to finish their education. Visual and literary artists also visited Italy to complete their classical and artistic training or simply to find inspiration from its beautiful countryside and ancient ruins. By the middle of the 19th century, the advent of faster boat travel brought even more people to join the swelling numbers. Americans were among this fast-growing itinerant population that included Nathaniel Hawthorne, his wife, Sophia, and family, who, during 1858, visited Rome during the winter months and spent a halcyon summer in Florence.

The major literary accomplishment from Hawthorne's sojourn in Italy—actually written in England—is his novel *The Marble Faun* (published in 1859). In this Italian "romance," Hawthorne draws heavily on personal encounters recorded in his journals, as he carefully details the environs of Rome's Pincian gardens, Piazza del Popolo, the old Forum and Colosseum, the Pantheon, the interior of St. Peter's Basilica and the Umbrian and Tuscan countryside. Along with his own observations, Hawthorne's perceptions about the art he describes are based on his interaction with the expatriate American art community—especially the sculptors Hiram Powers and William Wetmore Story (fig. 1).

The novel's conceptual message involves a journey from innocence to consciousness. In the opening paragraphs, Hawthorne introduces Donatello as a spirit of nature. His ancestral home in the Tuscan countryside, Monte Beni, has for generations housed a family in direct communion with nature; he is a living embodiment of the

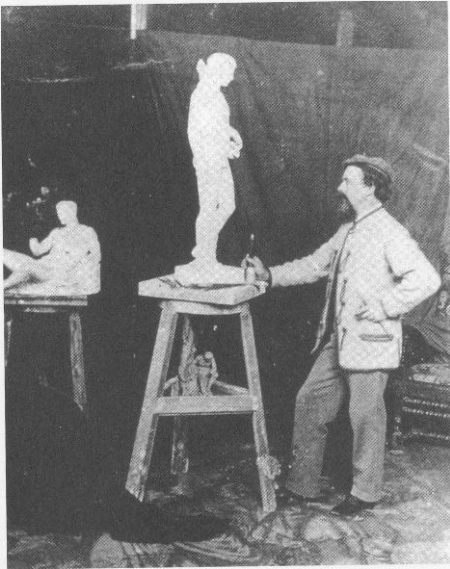


Figure 1: William Wetmore Story in his studio in Rome, 1865

pastoral ideal. Donatello, the last count of Monte Beni, has come to Rome and met up with a group of artists, two Americans and one of mysterious origins, who find a remarkable resemblance between him and the marble *Faun* of Praxiteles at the Capitoline Museum (fig. 2). Indeed, it is thought that Donatello even has the faun's pointed ears hidden beneath his myriad black curls. This coincidental connection is apt on another level, too. Although the group admires Donatello's physical beauty and lively spirit, he is considered, like the *Faun*, to be a creature of woods and fields, half man and half animal, not a fully developed human being. He is viewed as "a pet dog," an "underwitted" person trapped in "happy ignorance" (Hawthorne 14–19). As the story unfolds, Donatello murders a strange and frightening specter—in

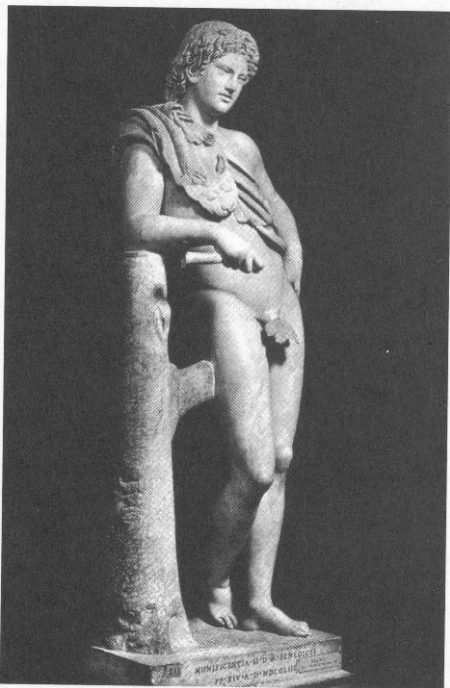


Figure 2: *Faun* of Praxiteles, fourth century B.C.

reality a Capuchin monk—who has been persecuting his beloved Miriam, the painter of mysterious origins. His crime or fall from innocence into consciousness is the beginning of Donatello's moral, hence human, development that unfolds as the story winds to its tragic climax. The other characters, as well, the innocent Hilda, the enigmatic Miriam and even the sculptor-narrator Kenyon experience different levels of heightened awareness of what it means to be human as a result of Donatello's crime. Hawthorne uses art to advance this theme of the "fortunate fall" and in the process touches on aspects of art criticism that invite some reflection about his understanding of the visual art he confronted while in Italy.¹

The Chiaroscuro of Existence

For Hawthorne, the good picture is the one that reveals truth: "The individual work is judged according to the degree [to] which it possesses a unifying life and light" ("Nathaniel" 187). Yet there is a paradox inherent in Hawthorne's view: The work must be sincere, but if sincere it is likely to express too much, the harlot will be substituted for the Madonna." In other words, "expressive art has the advantage of authenticity, but what it expresses may be too dangerous to confront" ("Nathaniel" 220). In *The Marble Faun*, Hawthorne engages this paradox by setting innocence against consciousness, light versus shade, with the characters of Hilda and Miriam.

Hilda, the puritanical American painter who gave up any ambition to pursue her own art in order to become an interpreter of the divine masters she so admires, is a copyist, and in her successive imitations of artistic prototypes she often penetrates to the essence of the original:

If a picture had darkened into an indistinct shadow, through time and neglect . . . she seemed to possess the faculty of seeing it in its pristine glory. . . . In some instances, even . . . she had been enabled to execute what the great Master had conceived in his imagination, but had not so perfectly succeeded in putting upon canvas. (50)

This divinely inspired innocence is reinforced by Hilda's connection to the shrine of the virgin that she dutifully maintains in her "dove

1. The above contains excerpts from Gengareilly 41-43.

coat" several stories above the sordid Roman streets. Purity and whiteness attend her throughout the novel as she strikes through the darkened images she copies to the light of their original inspiration, combined, perhaps, with her own imaginative vision.

Hilda's best friend and opposite number is Miriam, the mysterious dark woman, a painter also, whose subject matter is preoccupied with death and violence and whose work features a self-portrait described by Hawthorne as "the very saddest picture ever painted or conceived." Miriam well understands the brotherhood of guilt, and taunts Donatello during his prelapsarian moment in the novel:

"And what should a boy like you—a Faun, too—know about the joys and sorrows, the intertwining light and shadow, of human life? . . . You cannot suffer deeply; therefore, you can but half enjoy." (42)

Miriam sees the necessity for a juxtaposition of light with dark to reveal the full measure of human experience, even to gauge the value and worth of a work of art. This critical perception is reflected in Miriam's comments about Hilda's shortsightedness regarding a painting by Guido Reni:

"If it cost her more trouble to be good, if her soul were less white and pure, she could be a more competent critic of this picture, and would estimate it not half so high." (138)

Hilda eventually comes into the shadowed land that surrounds Miriam—she is a secret witness to Donatello's crime and Miriam's complicity in the murder. Her whiteness stained by exposure to evil, Hilda rejects Miriam and suffers the pain of the disillusioned innocent. As Hawthorne explains:

When that knowledge comes, it is as if a cloud had suddenly gathered over the morning light; so dark a cloud that there seems to be no longer any sunshine behind it or above it. (238)

Hilda now lurches through the galleries in Rome unable to embrace the Italian masters' work in quite the same way. Lost innocence renders her suspicious of their motives; she begins to see some artifice in their depictions of spiritual expression. She discovers that some "were not human, nor addressed their work to human sympathies, but to a false intellectual taste" (243). Hilda no longer has "a gifted simplicity of vision" that hitherto carried an imperfect work to spiri-

tual expression but, instead, has been overcome by a different mood, "cold and critical." But her fall into consciousness, though painful, has its compensations: "She saw beauty less vividly, but felt truth, or the lack of it, more profoundly" (244). No longer does she admire the work of mannerist painters such as Guido Reni but is drawn to the more direct and naturalistic images of early Renaissance masters such as Fra Angelico.

For Hawthorne, then, light and dark are necessary not only to reveal form but also to uncover the true art and moral quality of being human. The lost Eden is the real, flawed world, the land of light and dark, the place where the soul evolves and personal growth occurs. In this vein, the author concludes: "Adam saw [Eden] a brighter sunshine, but never knew the shade of pensive beauty which Eden won from his expulsion" (201). So Hawthorne employs an artistic metaphor, the tension between light and dark, the chiaroscuro of shaded transitions that took civilization out of the Middle Ages, away from the divine splendor of two-dimensional representation, into the Renaissance, hence the real world of human existence, in order to punctuate his perception of the "fortunate fall."

The Classical Ideal

Hawthorne, like many of his fellow American artists in Italy, was drawn to the classical ideal. In fact, modern Italy and especially contemporary Rome, with its Baroque Catholicism, was viewed as an obstruction to a more glorious past. Surveying the old Forum from the heights of the Campidoglio, the author concludes: "Rome, as it now exists, has grown up under the Popes, and seems like nothing but a heap of broken rubbish, thrown into the great chasm between our own days and the Empire" (85). Hawthorne carefully avoids any comment on Baroque sculpture or architecture. Bernini is an all but forgotten artist, conspicuously absent from the pages of *The Marble Faun*. A visit to "The Cathedral of the World" by the novel's characters ignores the Baroque splendor of St. Peter's, while the author's alter ego, Kenyon, the American sculptor, remarks that the grand structure could well use some "painted windows." This aversion to the Baroque has been partially explained by the fact that American puritan sensibilities rejected its sensuousness, were repelled by such sculptural groups as Bernini's *Ecstasy of St. Theresa* in the Cornaro

Chapel of Santa Maria della Vittoria. Baroque art was considered decadent: its stylistic extravagance perceived as a radical deviation from the purity of form inherent in the classical ideal.

It was not to pure classicism that Hawthorne and his colleagues were attracted, however, but to the more personal, individual and realistic art of neoclassicism. Hawthorne's image of classical Arcadia in *The Marble Faun*, for instance, has neoclassical as well as modern transcendental overtones. The original Arcadia, referenced in Virgil's *Eclogues* and exemplified by such master works as Giorgione's *Concert Champêtre*, is clearly not what Hawthorne had in mind. His is not a middle pastoral landscape visited by nude muses of poetry and song, an idle celebration of love with lyrical and musical harmonies. Rather, Hawthorne's rustic idol is found in an actual view he describes from the machicolated battlements of the country estate of the fictional Monte Beni family (nearly the same location and vantage point enjoyed by the Hawthorne family during their summer stay in Tuscany):

The sculptor [Kenyon] felt as if his being were suddenly magnified a hundredfold, so wide was the Umbrian valley that suddenly opened before him, set in its grand framework of nearer and more distant hills. . . . The trim vineyards were there, and the fig trees, and the mulberries, and the smoky-hued tracts of the olive orchards; there, too, were fields of every kind of grain, among which waved the Indian corn, putting Kenyon in mind of the fondly remembered acres of his father's homestead. White villas, gray convents, church spires, villages, towns, each with its battlemented walls and towered gateway, were scattered upon this spacious map; a river gleamed across it. (188)

Hawthorne has, here, in effect sketched a picture from the Hudson River school of American landscape painting: a neoclassically framed bucolic reality. He even embraces an Emersonian transcendentalist moment as his character reflects on the vista he has experienced:

"Thank God for letting me again behold this scene! . . . How it strengthens the poor human spirits . . . to ascend but this little way above the common level, and so attain a somewhat wider glimpse of His dealings with mankind! He doeth all things right! His will be done!" (188)

Hawthorne's classical vision is one laced with current reality; he sees Arcadian beauty, filters the Golden Age through the lens of a 19th-century American artist/transcendentalist.

Hawthorne's comments on classical sculpture also reverberate with notions of individuality and realism. His Italian journals reflect a novice art critic attracted to the pure Hellenic prototypes of idealized beauty but, nonetheless, reassuringly connected to the more earthbound examples of Hellenistic, Roman and early Renaissance sculpture. During a visit to the Vatican galleries, Hawthorne evidences both his attraction to the antique models and a reassertion of his naturalistic inclinations:

I am partly sensible that some unwritten rules of taste are making their way into my mind; that all this Greek beauty has done something toward refining me, who am still, however, a very sturdy Goth. (Vance 184)

Hawthorne and Sophia feel much more comfortable in the Capitoline Museum, where antique Roman portrait busts demonstrate the revelations of an individual personality. As Bill Vance phrases it in *America's Rome*, "The value of the individualizing realism of these Roman portraits is precisely in its showing that the originals are not reducible to a common type; each is unique, the victim or beneficiary of an extraordinary destiny from which, however, psychological and ethical principles may be inferred" (186). Hawthorne's sculptor in *The Marble Faun* is also drawn to the individualized realism of the Hellenistic and Roman periods. The emerging bust of Cleopatra, borrowed from the oeuvre of William Wetmore Story and present in Kenyon's fictional studio, reveals repose and latent energy, tenderness and passion, womanly beauty and Egyptian particularity—excellent combinations of formal purity and personal expression. For the most part, this perception of classical realism was shared by a number of American sculptors abroad in Italy, especially the ones admired by Hawthorne.

During their stay in Rome, Nathaniel and Sophia were present when a version of the *Venus de Medici* was unearthed on the Roman Campagna (fig. 3). Recounted in *The Marble Faun* as the accidental experience of Kenyon, Donatello and Miriam, this discovery led Hawthorne to reconsider a piece of sculpture he had hitherto greatly admired. Taking Story's advice, he reevaluated the statue after con-

templating the vacant Hellenic features of the *Venus*' face, which, for him, made the statue void of intellectual content. However beautiful and modest—the features that had first attracted Hawthorne—the *Venus* lost all significance when the breath of human life seemed to desert her. As Vance relates, "It is obvious that for Hawthorne there was nothing to be said once the 'intellectual' and 'spiritual' aspects of *Venus*—which resided entirely in her face—were no longer perceptible" (209). This preference for the world of conscious awareness over that of abstract, idealized perfection is certainly featured as an important sensibility in the fictional *Marble Faun*.

While in Florence, the Hawthornes visited the Bargello museum and were much taken by the 15th-century statue of *David* by the Renaissance sculptor Donatello, an early work (1430–32) and the first

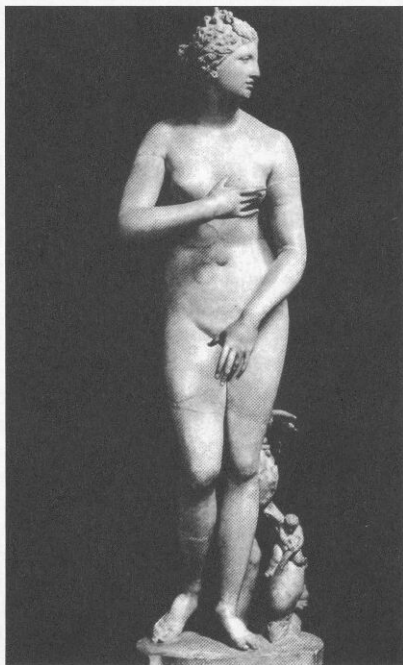


Figure 3: *Venus de Medici*, 100 B.C.

statue in the nude since the classical period (fig. 4). According to a perceptive article by Lea Newman, "Hawthorne's Summer in Florence," Hawthorne derived both the name and the essential characteristics of his novel's main protagonist from this encounter. For the Donatello of *The Marble Faun* is not only named after the famous sculptor, he also has the beauty and boyish features of the bronze *David*, as well as the latent capacity to act dramatically and kill a Goliathlike specter haunting his adored Miriam (Newman 65). Clearly, the realism of this early Renaissance piece captured Hawthorne's imagination, which further confirms the fact that the author's classical affinities, informed by such mentors as the American sculptor Hiram Powers, whose studio was near the Hawthornes' residence in Florence, were definitely rooted in the humanistic tradition of Hellenistic Greece and classical Rome.

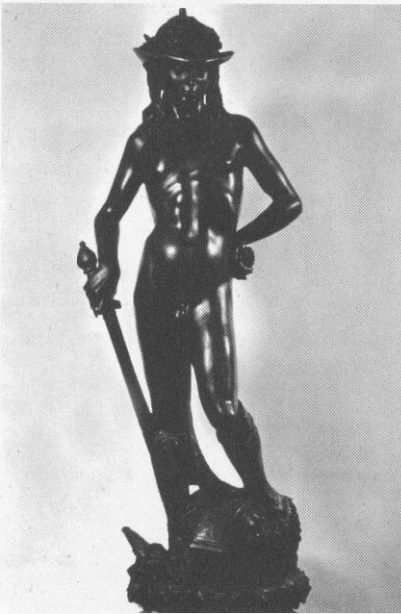


Figure 4: Donatello, *David*, 1430–32

The Marble Faun reflects this disposition, too, when Kenyon visits the Belvedere Court at the Vatican and encounters both the Hellenic prototype of male beauty, the *Apollo Belvedere* (fig. 5), and the agonized sculptural group, the Hellenistic *Laocoön* (fig. 6). Hawthorne first describes Kenyon's attitude toward the Hellenic Greek prototype:

He questioned, at that moment, whether sculpture really ever softens and warms the material which it handles; whether carved marble is anything but limestone, after all; and whether the *Apollo Belvedere* itself possesses any merit above its physical beauty. (281)

Then the author continues to follow Kenyon's reflections as he examines the Hellenistic figures caught in the coils of a serpent:

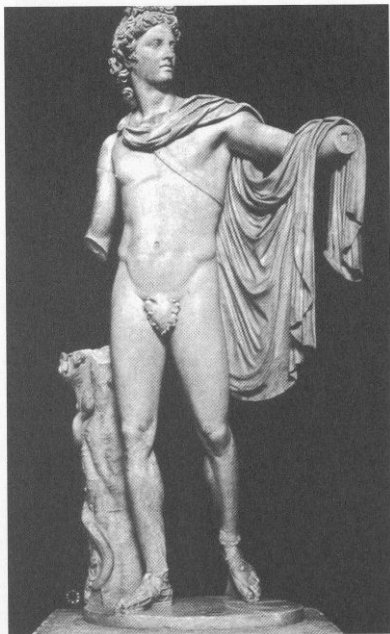


Figure 5: *Apollo Belvedere*, 350 B.C.(Roman copy)

Nothing pleased him, unless it were the group of the *Laocoön*, which, in its immortal agony, impressed Kenyon as a type of the long, fierce struggle of man, involved in the knotted entanglements of Error and Evil, those two snakes, which, if no divine help intervene, will be sure to strangle him and his children in the end. (281)

It is the reality of the agony and pain of the *Laocoön* that holds Kenyon's rapt attention and represents as well the struggle the novel's characters have undergone in their battles with "Error and Evil." The Fall, fortunate or not, is real for Kenyon, Miriam, Hilda and Donatello, and for their literary creator; it is therefore the personal, individual and realistic manifestation of the classical ideal that Hawthorne prefers and uses to advance the theme of his novel.

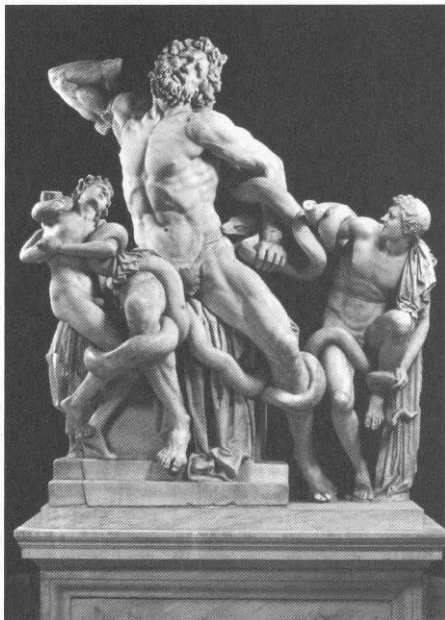


Figure 6: *Laocoön Group*, first century B.C.

Neoplatonism and the Unfinished Work

The Marble Faun's characters are in various stages of moral awareness; the evolution of their souls in a fallen world of consciousness remains incomplete. As they reach for the light, glimpsed in the skies over Monte Beni or from the rooftop of St. Peter's in Rome, Donatello and his artist friends are portrayed as unfinished works of art. Several times in the novel Hawthorne refers to a sculptural work in progress and suggests a latent form in the material out of which it is being made:

As the skillful workman gave stroke after stroke of the chisel with apparent carelessness, but sure effect, it was impossible not to think that the outer marble was merely an extraneous environment; since the human countenance within its embrace must have existed there since the limestone ledges of Carrara were first made. (89)

Kenyon's Roman artisans, all this while, had been at work on the *Cleopatra*. The fierce Egyptian queen had now struggled almost out of the imprisoning stone; or, rather, the workmen had found her within the mass of marble, imprisoned there by magic, but still fervid to the touch with fiery life. (272)

Carrying the point of the unfinished work to a general human condition, Miriam at one juncture speculates: "As these busts in the block of marble, so does our individual fate exist in the limestone of time. We fancy that we carve it out; but its ultimate shape is prior to all our action" (90).

Given this perception, it is certainly tempting to speculate that Hawthorne may have had in mind the Neoplatonic idea articulated by Michelangelo, who proposed that the sculptor did not really model the statue but, rather, chipped away the exterior marble to reveal the imprisoned form. According to Neoplatonic theory, there is a perfection of life that exists prior to and beyond our own that can perhaps be glimpsed in a work of art. Hawthorne reflects this notion in a dialogue between Hilda and Kenyon over the sculptor's unfinished bust of Cleopatra. Hilda comments:

"I am afraid that this final despair, and sense of shortcoming, must always be the reward and punishment of those who

try to grapple with a great or beautiful idea. . . . The idea leaves you an imperfect image of itself. . . . Nobody . . . ought to read poetry, or look at pictures or statues, who cannot find a great deal more in them than the poet or artist has actually expressed. Their highest merit is suggestiveness." (273)

Hawthorne carries this Neoplatonic sense of an emerging soul—in the case of sculpture, a figure trapped in stone reaching for the light and ultimate freedom that transcends the material weight of the world—in his description, through the mouth of Hilda once more, of the yet-to-be-finished bust of the fictional Donatello:

"It has an effect as if I could see this countenance gradually brightening while I look at it. It gives the impression of a

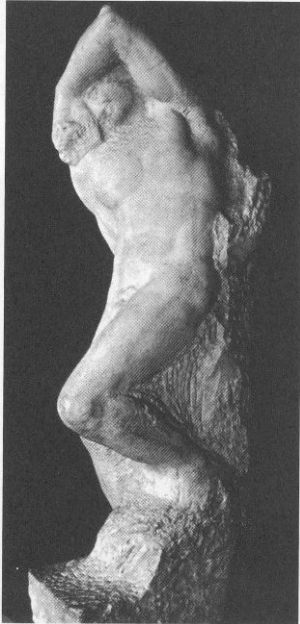


Figure 7: Michelangelo, *Unfinished Slave*, 1527–28

growing intellectual power and moral sense. . . . It is the Faun, but advancing towards a state of higher development.
“(274)

This image of an evolving soul as an unfinished work of art certainly fits the theme of the “fortunate fall.” As Kenyon endeavors to explain to Hilda: “Was that very sin—into which Adam precipitated himself and all his race—was it the destined means by which, over a long pathway of toil and sorrow, we are to attain a higher, brighter, and profounder happiness than our lost birth right gave?” (311).

Once again, Michelangelo comes to mind; this time it is his unfinished slaves, originally intended for the tomb of Julius II, that are suggested (fig. 7). We know that Michelangelo viewed these forms as individual souls striving to free themselves from matter, the dross material that bound them to the earth and denied their heavenly home. Was Hawthorne influenced by the Renaissance master? He leaves us a small clue in the final comment on Kenyon’s decision to leave the bust of Donatello in its incomplete form: “And, accordingly, Donatello’s bust (like that rude, rough mass of the head of Brutus, by

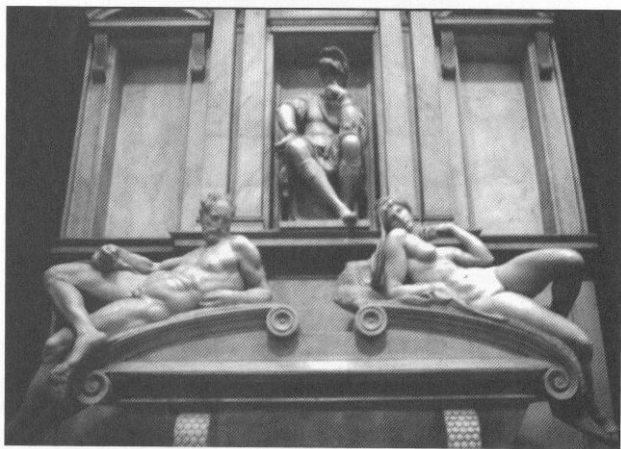


Figure 8: Michelangelo, *Tomb of Lorenzo de Medici*, San Lorenzo, 1524–34

Michael Angelo, at Florence) has ever since remained in an unfinished state" (274).

Newman's account also helps us by placing Hawthorne in the Medici Chapel of the cathedral of San Lorenzo in Florence during the summer of 1858, where he and Sophia admired Michelangelo's sculptural group over the tomb of Lorenzo de Medici. The Renaissance prince, Lorenzo, is seen in brooding contemplation as he sits above the inert figures of Dusk and Dawn, who represent the earthly cycle of life and death that traps the soul, holds it back from heavenly union (fig. 8). Did the Neoplatonic message of the Medici Chapel translate to Hawthorne and *The Marble Faun*? At least we can say that the message is there, inherent in the pages of the text, if not totally explicated by its author. But one might well consider that Hawthorne and his artistic contemporaries were indeed aware of the Neoplatonic dimension of the unfinished work of art, a dimension that fits so well Hawthorne's treatment of his fictional characters' moral unfolding in *The Marble Faun*.

Conclusion

At the risk of being somewhat speculative, I feel it is helpful to our understanding of *The Marble Faun* to move away from the text into the cultural context of expatriate American artists in Italy during the 19th century. In that broader field, connections and reverberations among its many players provide a varied and heightened understanding of certain components that make up the individual work of literature. It is my contention that, in this instance, Hawthorne's literary art was informed by his awareness of a range of visual art and, more specifically, by certain shared attitudes toward it that contain aspects of art history and cultural aesthetics: (1) chiaroscuro and its application to art and life, as represented by the fictional painters Hilda and Miriam; (2) the classical ideal in its realistic and contemporary application, clearly preferred by the author to underscore the conscious moral evolution of his characters; and (3) the Neoplatonic dimension of the unfinished work, prominently featured as a defining metaphor in Hawthorne's Italian "romance."

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Global Justice and the Absence of Universal Morality: Rawlsian Perspectives on Human Rights and International Relations¹

By Paul O. Nnodim

Introduction

John Rawls was James Bryant Conant University Professor Emeritus of Philosophy at Harvard University until his death in 2002. Today he is perhaps the most influential figure in contemporary Western legal and political philosophy. Epistemological glibness shrouds most contemporary theories of justice and quite often trivializes the urgency of the subject matter. Rawls's works, especially his *opus magnum* of 1971—*A Theory of Justice—Political Liberalism* (1993) and *The Law of Peoples* (1999) are among the few whose seriousness of purpose makes the discussion of justice a viable topic in contemporary political philosophy.

¹ This article is part of a lecture I gave at the seventh international congress of the Austrian Philosophical Society, University of Salzburg, Austria, in January 2004. Ontos Verlag (Frankfurt a.M.) and Transaction Books of Rutgers University (Piscataway, NJ) published the German version of this lecture in 2005 as chapter 11 of the book *Gerechtigkeit auf der Suche Nach Einem Gleichgewicht* (Hrsg Otto Neumaier et al.). Here is the English version of that chapter with some addenda. I am grateful to Matt Silliman, Dave Johnson and Rita Nnodim for very useful comments.

This article is concerned with the problem of ascertaining the relevance of Rawls's liberal theory to questions of global justice and human rights. My main interest here is to find answers to the following important questions: Can Rawls's theory achieve universal applicability and validity? Is Western liberal pluralism and liberal democracy exportable to the so-called nonliberal or illiberal societies? How are liberal societies to relate to nonliberal societies on economic matters and questions of justice in the international forum? Furthermore, Rawls and some other contemporary international legal theorists argue that the present international standard of human rights (Universal Declaration of Human Rights, hereinafter UDHR) cannot achieve any universal validity, owing to its parochial and ethnocentric origins. Is this the fact?

In opposition to Rawls's position, this article will consider the viability of a retrospective cultural-legitimacy argument for UDHR norms. Retrospective cultural-legitimacy thesis refers to the search for legitimacy, validity or acceptability for those UDHR norms imposed on some non-Western countries in 1948 by the United Nations, without being sensitive to the background cultures of these countries. In this article, some of these norms will be broadly reexamined alongside the cultural specificities of some non-Western societies.

Rawls made substantial efforts to answer some of the questions raised in this article, especially in *The Law of Peoples*. However, I am inclined to argue that his liberal internationalism consciously abandons some core liberal principles in order to achieve broader acceptance, especially among nonliberal societies. Thus, acceptability erroneously becomes a synonym for normative justification of moral principles. An important issue addressed in this article is Rawls's attenuation of the existing international human-rights norms (UDHR), in order to avoid possible charges of ethnocentrism and cultural imperialism. In this way, his liberal internationalism fails to extricate itself from the burden of *culturalism* and value relativism. My appropriation of the term *culturalism* here slightly differs from its contemporary sociocultural anthropological meaning. While the contemporary culturalist emphasizes the importance of culture in determining behavior, *culturalism* in my understanding rejects cross-cultural criticism—*Kulturkritik*—of particular cultures.

Rawls's Global Justice Theory

The *law of nations*² envisaged by Rawls in *A Theory of Justice* prompted some of his prominent followers, such as Charles Beitz (*Political Theory*) and Thomas Pogge (*Realizing Rawls*, "Egalitarian Law"), to propose a cosmopolitan reformation of Rawls's "justice as fairness."

Within the framework of a functioning Western liberal society, Rawls's justice as fairness requires the implementation of the following principles of justice:

First: each person is to have an equal right to the most extensive basic liberty compatible with a similar liberty for others.³

Second: social and economic inequalities are to be arranged so that they are both (a) reasonably expected to be to everyone's advantage, and (b) attached to positions and offices open to all. (60)

The (a) section of the second principle is known as the *difference principle*. On further interpretation, it allows the state to tax the rich in order to alleviate the situation of the worse disadvantaged members of the society. The rich in turn benefit from such a principle by living in a relatively safe and less antagonistic society. The cosmopolitan reformation advocated by Beitz and Pogge would take justice as fairness to a higher level of abstraction, where it will transcend the domestic Western liberal society to assume an international status.

Thus, "justice as fairness" is to express a full-blown egalitarian theory of global distributive justice, providing remedies to today's problems of global justice (Wenar 85).

The position of Beitz and Pogge undoubtedly aimed to persuade Rawls to change his line of thought on international justice, which many of his critics claim substantially contradicts his domestically conceived egalitarian liberal principles of distributive justice. Their cosmopolitan view provides an alternative to Rawls's nation-centric conception of international justice.

² The law of nations is the version of international justice and relations Rawls proposed in 1971. With the recast of *A Theory of Justice* in 1993, this idea of international justice and relations became obsolete.

³ Rawls's notion of basic liberty encapsulates the following: the right to vote and be eligible for public office, freedom of speech and assembly, liberty of conscience and freedom of thought, freedom from arbitrary arrest, the right of person and the right to hold personal property (*Theory* 61).

The view of Beitz and Pogge on global justice, unlike that of Rawls, is rather an international conception of justice, which sees the individual person as a participating member of the international society and as a legitimate subject of international justice, irrespective of the contingent circumstances that define his or her origin, position in society or biographical standpoint. The international society, according to cosmopolitanism, is a global union of societies or *cosmopolis*, and persons rather than nations or states are to form its proper constitutive elements (Nardin 234).

With the publication of *The Law of Peoples* in 1999 (an extension of *Political Liberalism* of 1996 to issues of international relations and global justice), Rawls set forth his legacy of social liberalism and in so doing disappointed many of his adherents (Beitz "Liberalism" 515–529). Here he reiterates his position on global justice, insisting that the domain of international justice and relations among nations does not encompass a cosmopolitan notion of distributive justice.

As Terry Nardin rightly points out, when debating international justice, it is very important to specify whether it is the entitlement of individuals or of nations that is at stake, since these two ways of considering the subjects of international justice have the propensity to generate differing results (233).

Considering the primary subjects of justice, Rawls's conception of international justice as put forth in *The Law of Peoples* ignores "persons" and settles for the notion of "peoples" (understood as societies or nations). International justice so conceived hinges on the idea of cooperation among societies that are in Rawls's view internally well ordered. This form of cooperation is based on principles of nonaggression, adherence to the international law of peoples and mutual aid to burdened societies (Hinsch 58–78).

Rawls's international law of peoples circumscribes the following:

1. Peoples are free and independent, and their freedom and independence are to be respected by other peoples.
2. Peoples are to observe treaties and undertakings.
3. Peoples are equal and are parties to the agreements that bind them.
4. Peoples are to observe a duty of non-intervention.
5. Peoples have the right of self-defense but no right to instigate war for reasons other than self-defense.

6. Peoples are to honor human rights.
7. Peoples are to observe certain specified restrictions in the conduct of war.
8. Peoples have a duty to assist other peoples living under unfavorable conditions that prevent their having a just or decent political and social regime. (*Law* 37)

Noticeably absent in "The Law of Peoples" is any form of egalitarian principle reminiscent of the "difference principle" designed to regulate the distribution of the burdens of social and economic cooperation among "persons" across nations. In Rawls's view, the application of the difference principle at the global level is not justifiable. Unlike the difference principle, which conceives liberal democratic citizens as equal persons, Rawls's Law of Peoples, which regulates international relations and justice, does not embody a conception of person in this liberal sense.

As Rawls puts it: "The Law of Peoples does not say, for example, that human beings are moral persons and have equal worth in the eyes of God, or that they have certain moral and intellectual powers that entitle them to these rights" (*Law* 68).

Rawls thinks it will be unfair to nonliberal societies to introduce a liberal conception such as the difference principle into the codex of international law and relations. This line of argument derives from the fact that decent hierarchical societies may have conceptions of citizenship that run parallel to liberal conceptions. Hierarchical societies may not regard their citizens as individual, equal and free persons but, rather, conceptualize the idea of citizenship from communalistic or group-oriented backgrounds.

As Wilfried Hinsch notes, Rawls also holds the view that the redistribution of global economic wealth to the benefit of poor countries in accordance with the difference principle is not tenable (70). Rawls's central argument here derives from his conviction that cultural ties and feeling of affinity among world peoples are weak.

Hence, the moral psychology needed to generate an international sense of justice and sentiments, which could give rise to distributive justice based on the liberal idea of the difference principle, is absent at the global level. As an additional argument against demands for global redistributive justice, Rawls maintains that the arbitrary distribution of natural resources in the world does not provide persuasive reasons to justify the global redistribution of wealth.

This definitely conflicts with the arguments of the proponents of global distributive justice, who consider the unequal distribution of natural resources as unfair to many countries and, hence, a good reason to argue for the global redistribution of wealth. For Rawls, it is neither the possession of natural resources nor the lack of natural resources that makes countries rich or poor.

The economic prowess of rich countries (for example, the liberal democratic societies of the West) lies among other things in their political culture, industriousness and innovation, as well as in the religious, philosophical and moral traditions that support the basic structure of their political and social institutions. The causes of backwardness, Rawls argues, are primarily the lack of sound political and cultural tradition in poor countries, the absence of basic technological expertise, coupled with poor population policies and the state's failure to uphold human rights. Therefore, he reiterates, the arbitrariness of the distribution of natural resources is not responsible for a country's economic and social progress or lack of it.

In fact, Rawls declares that there is no country in the world (except in very marginal cases) so lacking in relatively sufficient natural resources as to prevent it from attaining the status of a well-ordered society, were it to be reasonably and rationally governed. The possession of natural resources in many instances, he says, has proved to make some countries less innovative and economically less successful than those that are lacking in them. Rawls succinctly expresses this view when he observes that "historical examples seem to indicate that resource-poor countries may do very well (e.g., Japan), while resource-rich countries may have serious difficulties (e.g., Argentina)" (*Law* 108).

From this line of argument, Rawls proceeds to enunciate what he believes constitutes a more viable conception of international justice; that is, one that embodies the notion of a "duty of assistance" to burdened societies. Societies that lack the political culture, historical traditions and basic technological know-how to become either decent or liberal well-ordered societies on their own are, in his global-justice theory, entitled to a transitional foreign aid. Such a duty of assistance, however, terminates at the stage in which a burdened society becomes self-supporting.

From this perspective, arguments for the redistribution of global wealth in favor of poor countries appear to be non sequitur. Since each decent or liberal society is autonomous, and its level of economic

development is dependent upon the sound articulation of its own policies, Rawls argues, the economic inequality emanating from the social or economic policies of one country when compared with those of another is the sole responsibility of the country in question. The burden of decisions freely made by a given liberal or decent society, he concludes, is to be borne entirely by both the present and the future generations of the given society alone.

To impose the consequences of free decisions of one society on another society under the pretense of distributive egalitarian global justice is for Rawls not acceptable. Following Rawls's conception of peoples as autonomous, equal and free, organized as liberal or decent societies, economic inequalities among peoples or nations have domestic origins. In economic terms, liberal and decent societies are thus masters of their own fate. Accordingly, a global-justice theory that envisages the redistribution of wealth among nations beyond the duty of assistance—that is, beyond minimal aid to developing burdened societies—is not justifiable.

However, a closer empirical study of the current global situation may render Rawls's position contestable. As Beitz counters, a meticulous study of the global issue of poverty and underdevelopment suggests that the sources of economic backwardness are not obviously attributable to internal factors or domestic policies of governments. The factors that underlie underdevelopment vary from one society to another, and thus, the relative importance of the general factors listed by Rawls is disputable ("Rawls" 669–696).

There are some serious points that Rawls seems to ignore in his discussion of global justice. Some of these issues inform the current global economic structure and invariably play a significant role in the development and underdevelopment of today's poor countries of the world. These include the role of transnational trade with its negative impacts on the economies of developing nations, the effects of globalized capitalist market structures, the debt policy of donor-rich countries and its effect on poor Third World countries, as well as the role of the international financial institutions such as the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank.

Considering these perspectives, Beitz thinks the causes of poverty are not easily distinguished:

[A] society's integration into the world economy, reflected in its trade relations, dependence capital markets, and

vulnerability to the policies of international financial institutions, can have deep and lasting consequences for the domestic economic and political structure. Under these circumstances, it may not even be possible to distinguish between domestic and international influences on a society's economic condition. ("Rawls" 690)

Rawls's liberal internationalism as propounded in *The Law of Peoples* fails to provide adequate and fair principles for transnational trade and economic relations persuasive enough to justify his position on global justice.

Rawls's idea of international justice requires that citizens (present and future generations) of liberal or decent societies be considered responsible for the costs incurred as a result of social or economic policies adopted in such societies. It is difficult, however, to accept as fair the idea of imposing the costs of possible imprudent choices of previous rulers and previous generations on the present or future generation of a poor society, who are citizens of such an unfortunate poor society based on contingent circumstances (Beitz "Rawls" 692). This explains why the duty of assistance as the basis of global justice is insufficient and incapable of providing adequate solutions to the pertinent challenges of global justice facing our contemporary world.

The Liberal Toleration of Nonliberals

Another important matter discussed in some detail in *The Law of Peoples* is how liberal societies are to deal with "decent-but-nonliberal" societies in the international forum. Rawls demands that liberal societies tolerate decent societies in the international "Society of Peoples." Toleration of decent societies by liberal societies not only entails liberal peoples' refraining from using political or economic sanctions, military force or diplomatic pressures to instigate political changes in nonliberal-but-decent societies, but further demands that liberal societies recognize decent societies as members with certain rights and obligations, participating on an equal basis in the Society of Peoples (Law 59).

Rawls's position on toleration here follows from the same line of thought he developed in *Political Liberalism*. Just as citizens of liberal societies must respect one another's comprehensive religious, philosophical and moral doctrines, liberal societies at the international level

should respect the cultures, traditions and values of other societies of the world (provided such societies honor the Law of Peoples). In addition, Rawls opines, since no society is static, decent societies should have the freedom to undergo internal reforms at their own pace.

The admittance of nonliberal-but-decent peoples into the Society of Peoples with the aforementioned equality status and respect, Rawls believes, would easily produce positive results in the direction of reforms that may lead decent societies to become liberal. When granted equal status, respect and recognition by liberal societies, decent societies would experience the advantages of liberal democratic structures through years of mutual cooperation and interaction with liberal societies and, as a result, would freely appropriate liberal values without external coercion (*Law* 59–62).

However, societies falling under the umbrella of “indecent” may face justifiable intolerance on the part of both decent and liberal societies. Such outlaw societies have no place within the forum of the international Society of Peoples. “Decency” as appropriated by Rawls in his international-justice theory is invariably a condition for toleration. A decent society could be hierarchical or nonhierarchical in nature. What stands as a necessary condition (though not a sufficient condition) for decency, he tells us, is that a decent society must honor the human rights inscribed in the international Law of Peoples (*Law* 80).

If honoring human rights is a core standard for decency, it becomes reasonable to examine meticulously what constitutes human rights for Rawls.

Human Rights and the Question of Retrospective Cultural Legitimacy

Rawls designates human rights as “a special class of urgent rights” (*Law* 79). These are in essence a very short list of specific rights and liberties. They include freedom from slavery, a sufficient measure of freedom of conscience and religion (excluding equal or full liberty of conscience) and the right of ethnic minorities to live without fear of massacre or genocide, right to personal property and the notion of formal equality, which does not encapsulate equality of persons as citizens in the liberal sense.

A glance at Rawls’s list of human rights gives rise to the suspicion that he has adjusted the liberal principles of rights in order to

accommodate the political interests of nonliberal societies. He writes, "Human rights, as thus understood, cannot be rejected as peculiarly liberal or special to western tradition. They are not politically parochial" (Law 65).

Thus, Rawls excludes from his liberal internationalism a substantial number of rights and liberties granted in liberal democratic societies and defended in *Political Liberalism*. Such rights include basic political liberties and freedom from discrimination based on religion, race, caste, ethnicity or gender. This set of rights further includes freedom of opinion and expression, freedom of the press, full and equal freedom of thought, conscience and religion (including the freedom of apostasy; that is, the right to change one's faith or religion and the right to question the orthodox interpretation of religious doctrine) (Hayden 131-132).

Rawls's list of human rights in this way also differs from the UDHR of 1948 and the subsequent covenants, which provide the present standard of internationally recognized norms of human rights. Examples of rights conscientiously annihilated in Rawls's lists of "Urgent Rights" are Articles 1 and 19 of the UDHR. Article 1 states: "All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights. They are endowed with reason and conscience and should act towards one another in a spirit of brotherhood." Article 19 stipulates that "Everyone has the right to freedom of opinion and expression; this right includes freedom to hold opinions without interference and to seek, receive and impart information and ideas through any media and regardless of frontiers."

From a comparative perspective, Rawls asserts that only Articles 3 to 18 of the UDHR embody human rights in the proper sense of the words. The rest of the articles, in his view, express ethnocentric, Western and liberal aspirations, which are culturally and historically contingent and as such incapable of achieving universal validity. Therefore, any broader and universally valid conceptualization of human rights must weaken the specific Western philosophical and cultural outlook of the UDHR, in order to fit into the space of reasonableness of non-Western decent societies.

The inherent liberal individualism expressed by the UDHR has to make way for peoples whose traditional and cultural practices do not recognize the value of liberal individualism but, rather, define persons in terms of community or group. Hence, in the international sphere,

liberal peoples must constrict the liberal conception of justice modeled on liberal individualism in order to accommodate decent peoples' "common good" conception of justice. Rawls, by dismissing particularly Article 1 of the UDHR, which grounds the normative importance of human rights on the quiddity of persons as human beings, undermines the importance of UDHR norms in our contemporary world and their role in shaping the global order.

The notion of decent society propounded in *The Law of Peoples*, Rawls maintains, is consistent with a reasonable interpretation of Islamic political ideas. Consequently, his model of a decent hierarchical society is the hypothetical Islamic People of Kazanistan:

In ¶9.3 I give an example of an imaginary decent hierarchical Muslim people whom I have named "Kazanistan." Kazanistan honors and respects human rights, and its basic structure contains a decent consultation hierarchy, thereby giving a substantial political role to its members in making political decisions. (64)

Rawls's criteria for a decent hierarchical society, as exemplified by Kazanistan, allows such a society the freedom to adopt comprehensive institutional forms, whether secular or religious, provided the political aims of such a society exclude expansionist interests. Rawls also describes such a society as associationist in nature. This means that such a society views its members in public life as segments of different groups, where a body represents each group in the existing legal system and in the consultation hierarchy.

The conception of justice existent in a decent hierarchical society is definable in terms of a "common good." Rawls makes it a rule that there must be a sincere and reasonable conviction on the part of judges and officials who administer the legal system that what they pronounce as judgment depends on a reasonable interpretation of this "common good" notion of justice. The system of law in a decent hierarchical society, according to him, is to impose moral duties and obligations on citizens and to secure for all members of society what they generally regard as human rights (*Law* 64–67).

The basic human rights operative in such a society need not encompass anything more than "a special class of urgent rights." The conception of person in a decent hierarchical society does not necessarily need to be liberal. A decent hierarchical society is under no

obligation to treat its citizens as equal persons. Rather, it classifies citizens as responsible and cooperating members of, for example, an ethnic group, caste or religious group, with duties, obligations and rights specific to each group (Tesón 295–315). Rawls's Kazanistan, as an ideal representative of a decent hierarchical society, fulfills the criteria of decency in the following ways:

A comprehensive religious doctrine informs the Kazanistani system of government. As Rawls explicates: "Kazanistan's system of law does not institute the separation of church and state" (*Law* 75). Therefore, it is plausible to conjecture that a certain interpretation of *shari'a*, Islamic law, informs the legal system regulating the basic structure of Kazanistan. Rawls seems to confirm this suspicion when he notes that in Kazanistan, Islam is the only favored religion and only Muslims can hold upper positions of political authority or influence government's policies (*Law* 75–76).

Although there is no equal or full liberty of conscience in Kazanistan, the state guarantees a sufficient measure of liberty of conscience and religion. Furthermore, the state in some specific senses tolerates non-Islamic religions and the members of such religions may practice their religions without fear of persecution. However, the state can deny members of non-Islamic religions certain civic and religious rights in accordance with the Islamic law.

Rawls's Kazanistan also honors the Law of Peoples and, hence, is not expansionist. Unlike the jihadists of old, Rawls tells us, Kazanistan does not give in to territorial aggrandizement and the building of empires. This is because of an enlightened Islamic theology that flourishes in such a society, leading its Islamic scholars to interpret jihad in a moral and spiritual sense, rather than in terms of physical military battles (*Law* 76).

Finally, Kazanistan's system of government embodies a consultation hierarchy and honors the basic human rights inscribed in the Law of Peoples:

I think it is also plausible to imagine Kazanistan as organized in a decent consultation hierarchy, which has been changed from time to time to make it more sensitive to the needs of its people and the many different groups represented by legal bodies in the consultation hierarchy. (*Law* 77)

Rawls's hypothetical Islamic state of Kazanistan, with its "common good" conception of justice and a comprehensive religious doc-

trine regulating its basic structure, is compatible with many of the illiberal tendencies he condemned in his liberal conception of justice as given, for instance, in *Political Liberalism*. Some of these tendencies are inequality of persons, which is tantamount to social and economic injustices, discrimination against women and injustice toward religious and other minorities.

Rawls, for instance, writes that there is a "sufficient measure" of liberty of conscience and freedom of religion and thought in Kazanistan, albeit without "equal or full liberty" of conscience (*Law* 65, 76). This simple rhetoric implies that the state legally denies equal liberty of conscience to members of minority religions, despite their cultural integration into the mainstream Muslim society (Tasioulas 383).

Rawls adds that minorities can practice their religions without fear of persecution or loss of most civic rights, except the right to hold higher political or judicial offices. This further suggests that besides the denial of the right to hold important offices, the state can legitimately deny non-Muslims certain civic rights, based on nothing other than religious reasons. It could be reasonably assumed that Islamic rulers could employ the denial of such rights to demonstrate the gains accompanying being Muslim and, hence, facilitate the conversion process of non-Muslims.

On further analysis, since the state of Kazanistan does not grant complete freedom of conscience, thought and religion, a Kazanistani Muslim may not have the choice to change his religion without persecution nor have the right to question the orthodox interpretation of Islamic doctrine. Bassam Tibi, on the interpretation of *shari'a*, notes, "Muslims themselves are not allowed to retreat from Islam. A Muslim who repudiates his or her faith in Islam can be prosecuted as a *murtadd* (apostate)" (104).

Under the Islamic law and the fragmented-group conception of citizens in the hypothetical state of Kazanistan, the state may legitimately subject women to unequal and unfair treatment. In Rawls's *Political Liberalism*, the political conception of justice exhibits the priority of right over the good, but the "common good" conception of justice he assigns to decent societies in *The Law of Peoples* is compatible with intolerant and unjust policies of the government.

Since determining what counts as a common good in certain instances appears enigmatic, to ground the conception of justice solely on this notion is very dangerous. Acting according to the presumed ideal of the common good, Rawls's decent hypothetical society of

Kazanistan may legitimately sanction horrendous practices against groups, sects or individuals perceived by the larger society as unproductive or prone to criminality. The conception of justice that made "gypsy hunting" an acceptable sporting event in Europe crystallizes this danger.⁴

In an attempt to extend the principle of liberal toleration to nonliberal or illiberal societies, as we can see, Rawls's liberal internationalism indulges in culturalism and value relativism. By weakening the internationally recognized human rights standard of the UDHR, Rawls believes he has captured the moral intuition of both liberal and nonliberal societies on what form of rights are to be accorded the status of human rights and hence capable of attaining universal acceptability.

The fear of possible charges of moral imperialism in international justice and relations obviously informs Rawls's action in shortening the list of the UDHR. Hence, he joins with those who argue that the current standard of international human rights with its liberal individualism and liberal conception of person is alien to many non-Western cultures. Arguments of this kind are popular among those who oppose the application of the UDHR norms in some non-Western countries of the world, such as Africa and Asia. Such arguments seem to emphasize that peoples, for instance, in traditional African and Asian societies are predominantly group or community oriented, rather than individualistic. Furthermore, proponents of such views consider peoples in group-oriented societies as lacking in individualistic psychology, which grants persons the impetus to make individual claims of rights against their government (Howard 165). Rawls and those who oppose the universal application of the UDHR norms conclude that since the existing international standard on human rights originates from within the framework of Western liberal individualism, it becomes exceptionally difficult to realize this standard within the cultures of non-Western societies.

In fact, some non-Western traditions and cultures may actually have ways of conceiving and expressing "rights" that may not tally with the Western tradition and culture. As Virginia Leary notes:

⁴ Gypsy is a derogatory term for the Romani people of Europe. Following stereotypical judgments, the mainstream European population persecuted the Romani people (or the *Sinti* and *Roma*, as they are called in German), especially during the Middle Ages.

The rich cultures of Asia and Africa express matters of human dignity in terms other than "rights." Many of these cultures, in contrast, value a sense of community and stress duties to family and community more than they emphasize individualism and rights. (16)

Nevertheless, as Rhoda Howard argues, the existence of community-rooted ethics in African and Asian societies does not negate the role and importance of human rights to these societies. It will amount to a definist fallacy, if human rights are defined in terms and meanings that exclude communalistic or communitarian conceptions of rights. However, the international human-rights norms are there to protect individuals against abuses, irrespective of whether these individuals are persons or groups (communities) (Howard 165).

Hence, we should not undermine the relevance of the existing international standard of human rights on the assumption that individualistic conceptions of rights are alien to non-Western cultures and traditions. Rather, we need a cross-cultural dialogue aimed at reinterpreting the liberal conception of person and right from within the framework of group and community-rooted conception of human dignity (Howard 182).

A more viable approach in the search for universal validity and applicability of UDHR norms is one that encompasses a retrospective cultural-legitimacy thesis. The retrospective cultural-legitimacy argument entails a reinterpretation of the UDHR norms from within the specific cultures, worldviews and traditions of non-Western societies, where these norms are presently considered alien (An-Na'im 20-21). The cultural-legitimacy thesis is to be informed by a sincere cross-cultural dialogue. As Bhiku Parekh notes:

If universal values are to enjoy widespread support and democratic validation and be free of ethnocentric biases, they should arise out of an open and uncoerced cross-cultural dialogue. Such a dialogue should include every culture with a point of view to express. In so doing we show respect for them, and give them a motive to comply with the principle of holding a cross-cultural dialogue. We also ensure that such values as we arrive at are born out of different historical experiences and cultural sensibilities, free of ethnocentric biases, and thus genuinely universal. The dialogue occurs both

in large international gatherings of governmental and non-governmental representatives and in small groups of academics and intellectuals. (139)

The aim of such an intercultural dialogue is not to argue for the existence of a natural universal morality, since peoples' traditions, religions and moral conceptions are shaped by historical and other contingent circumstances. It is to aim, as Parekh suggests, not at discovering values but rather at reaching a consensus on already existing international norms (140).

Such an intercultural dialogue aimed at seeking retrospective cultural legitimacy for UDHR is tenable, if done with respect toward other cultures and if adequate knowledge of local cultures informs the background discussions. This would also undermine any possible charges of ethnocentrism (Tan 34, 208).

Considering the interdependence of peoples, the dynamism and interconnectedness of world cultures and the present trend of globalization, we could reasonably and optimistically say that achieving retrospective cultural legitimacy for UDHR, where the applicability of the existent international norms is not yet firmly rooted, is quite feasible. After all, the people of the world are constantly engaged in a cultural *métissage* and the philosophical appropriation of the "other." World cultures are not hermetic bubbles.

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CORPUS

By Kelli Newby

I

She always started at Trafalgar Square, the center of the city, wading through the pigeons to an empty seat along the fountain. The number of pigeons still amazed her every time. Each pigeon was hardly worth a thought, but taken as one creature seemed to breathe around her feet, lying like a living stain across the square. The flannel scarf tucked into her jacket trapped heat inside the black wool coat that kept the dampness out and muted her American identity. Ankle deep in pigeons, she took her place near the lions, facing St. Martin-in-the-Fields, and settled into routine. There was nothing she could do from an ocean away but watch the birds.

The 22nd of December. Nearly Christmas and she hadn't planned on going home. The semester had ended weeks before, but she stayed in the city to take it on, to devour it in quick strides, pausing long enough to take in the sights, flitting from tourist trap to art museum and back to Trafalgar Square. For some time, the city had been all she needed, feeding her, entertaining her, offering her opportunities, filling her ears with voices from all over the world as she moved through it—transient, absorbent, observant. Through all her travels, the pigeons were a constant landmark. They were like home, always present no matter how far she strayed from the center. But now there was a funeral back home and a good-bye she wanted to make but didn't know if she could. Today the pigeons crowded her into herself, suffocating her with their mass, their stench, their filth: shifting, encroaching, swarming.

People came from all over the world to feed these birds, to have them perch on their heads, on their arms, on their children's heads and arms. The tourists laughed as the birds perched and pecked at hair and waterproof jackets. Every day she watched the tourists become trees with pigeon leaves. Their aviary foliage drifted down from their limbs, pooling and shifting in and out of paths, and the tourists with outstretched arms looked more like a forest than anything she had seen in a while.

Lately it seemed to her there were no trees in England. She had grown up on the edge of a forest. She and the boy up the street, Jesse, found two pine trees that had grown too close together so that they had become one tree with two bodies. Between them was a secret hideout where light filtered through the long soft white pine needles. She took the tree closer to the neighborhood and Jesse took the tree closer to the road. Because they were pine trees, she and Jesse could climb and climb without ever having to search for a foothold or a handhold. Resin leaked out at the joints and turned their hands black as they raced up their respective trees. When she could climb no higher, they stopped and rested in the boughs, sometimes gossiping, sometimes making plans for their ravine fort, sometimes just listening to cars pass on the distant road.

Pigeons were birds without trees. They thrived in treeless places, which explained why there were so many in London.

Every morning on the way to the Tube station they crossed her path with their meandering head-bobbing gait, randomly pecking at cement just in case there were some trace amount of disintegrated cracker that the ten million other pigeons had missed. They walked inches from a creature a hundred times their size, concerned only with food, moving always just soon enough, but never with purpose. They always turned as though their considerable body mass shifted suddenly, throwing them off course with the sublime awkwardness of the disproportionate.

Today she had wanted to kick a pigeon, have it bob up to her and then just wind up and feel it along her instep, an ugly, stupid head-bobbing football flying through the air. In the post-rush-hour, prelunch hazy mornings, there were often no witnesses: not one little old lady with a matching set of white terriers, not a single misplaced tourist ready with his tuppence and crumbs, not one clean-cut young professional secretly carrying a PETA card in the breast pocket of his

long wool raincoat. The pigeon, she imagined, would feel its feet lifted off the ground, spread its almost useless wings and for a moment know air and know flight as it would never know trees. She had daydreams of launching the pigeons into the air, one at a time, until the sky was full of specks of migration.

But mostly she wanted to kick pigeons because she hated them.

At first she courted the pigeons, waded in among them, amazed at their lack of fear, at their absolute disregard for humanity. Growing up in the country, she hardly saw pigeons. The closest thing she knew were mourning doves, and her grandfather killed them with a BB gun because, he said, they were dirty birds. Garbage eaters. They would make the other birds sick. She remembered watching her grandfather sitting at his kitchen table, waiting for the dirty birds, his eye lined up to the scope, the window cracked open just enough for him to have clear shot to the bird feeder. The gun fired with a spitting sound and the birds fell back off the perch. She remembered his old hard hands picking their small bodies up off the ground and carrying them behind the large pines along the back of the yard, where he buried them.

She remembered crying when her grandfather picked the bird off the ground the first time she saw it. There was a spot of blood on the bird's broad breast and she thought her grandfather a murderer and could not look at him for the rest of the day without imagining the corpse there. He picked it up with his right hand, and even years later, she still paused before she took that hand.

She had studied the pigeons and classified them. She had ample opportunity to observe the birds as she learned London on foot. There were cow pigeons, black-and-white birds with random smaller patches. Cow pigeons were the bravest pigeons, or the stupidest. They were always the first to approach a tourist or wander into the street after a discarded sandwich crust. Penguin pigeons were also black and white, but with more geometric patches. There were Mary Poppins pigeons that had an iridescent sheen to them, usually around the neck. They were green or gray for the most part, with a tiny line around the base of the neck where the iridescence started. She had liked these pigeons the most; no birds at her grandfather's feeder had ever been iridescent. There were Cadbury pigeons, which looked like cow pigeons, only brown. There were purple pigeons, which were actually more black than purple, but she liked the way "purple pigeon" felt when she said it. It had the fun sound of a children's television show or a campfire song.

All of her time in London, all of that time with art and theatre and music and culture, something remained unsettled within her. On a bus in the Alps, she suddenly had a deep craving for trees and she recalled the white pines and Jesse. The nearly forgotten memory played over and over in her mind—the feel of the bark against her back, how dizzy she felt looking down and how she ran the soft needles across her palm as she whispered to Jesse about that time they saw the dead snake in the crick. It took longer to climb down because she was afraid of heights, but he always waited for her at the bottom and coached her for the last six or seven feet, telling her he would catch her if she slipped.

A cow pigeon wandered up to her and she shuffled her feet enough to drive it away, back toward the tourists. It had red beady eyes. A nearby family shouted and laughed as the pigeons climbed onto their arms, the father busily dropping fistfuls of pounds for enough bread crumbs to give each one of his children the London pigeon experience. The cow pigeon flapped its wings and made a dumpy jump onto the head of a five-year-old boy who squealed and stood stock-still. His mother got to one knee and took a picture, as three pigeons hopped up onto her back.

The Americans on the Tube and in the museums were loud and unsettling. She felt herself thinking the word “boorish,” though it was old-fashioned. She could hear them coming from three galleries away, and she bit her bottom lip to prevent any of her American words from slipping out until they passed. But these families reminded her of being home.

They had called this morning, waited out the time difference. Her family paused on the other end of the world. There was a heavy silence where usually there was a dog barking, siblings shouting news and both of her parents on the line, muting it all. She waited on the receiver. Her mother sobbed and choked out a few words.

“Car accident . . . Grandpa . . . didn’t suffer. We’ll try to get you home. He lived a good life. He always knew how much we loved him. There’s nothing you can do now. Dad is trying to find a ticket, but since it’s so close to the holiday. . . . It’s not really him anymore. We don’t even know if we can have an open casket. He would have wanted you to go on with your day.”

So she started at Trafalgar Square, as she always did. At the center of the city.

The little boy ran through the pigeons waving his arms and laughing. The pigeons scattered with a sudden throbbing whoosh of many feathers beating against the air, the air in motion. He flapped his arms and the birds continued to take flight one by one. The American father was already in pursuit of the child, picking him up and throwing him over his shoulder. They spun and spun, and she walked through the descending pigeon rain that became pigeon pools. They brushed against her feet as she left the square and she itched to kick one.

Three days before Christmas the cost of travel prohibited spontaneous trips. Her father thought there might be some kind of grief rate. She made her way to a phone booth just off the square, fingering the thin plastic calling card in her pocket. Staying away from the traditional red booth, the kind tourists want to take pictures of, she ducked into a more practical pay-phone hutch and dialed the numbers without looking at the card.

The airlines were all very busy, and she got a lot of busy signals, which, like the sirens here, were recognizable but tinny and foreign sounding. They seemed small. When she did get through, the cost was too much to bear on a student's savings and a meager credit-card limit. It was time to call home.

The automated phone calls and brusque employees left her frantic, and she misdialed the phone-card numbers twice, prompting the recorded English voice to say things like "I'm sorry. I don't understand. Please try again." She dialed again, her hand covered in black-ink notes from the last few phone calls—"one" for customer service, "seven" to book a flight, "eight" to speak to a real person, and a lightning bolt traced over and over as she was on hold, until it was a fat black jagged scar on the meaty part of her hand.

Her mother answered the phone. She sounded small, tinny and foreign. They traded information on flights and prices, said that they would both keep trying. They both knew the family could not afford such an expense, especially with the cost of funerals. She tried to make it sound like she would be fine sitting in Trafalgar Square, alone on Christmas while her family said their good-byes. Her mother meant to say something about family and being together, but it got lost in her exhausted sobs.

She felt herself get teary, felt her vision blur and a tear escape from the corner of her eye. She bit her lip and opened her eyes wide to hold it all in so as not to cry in a public phone booth half a block

from all the happy tourist families. She focused her attention on a passing Mary Poppins pigeon. It pecked at the ground twice and then bobbed a few inches and pecked at the ground again. For a moment, her mother's crying and the pigeons' rocking gait seemed to line up rhythmically. Sob, peck, sob, peck, peck.

Thump!

The side of a fist hit the Plexiglas with a ringing thud. There was a young couple standing just to the side of her booth, smiling. She kept her back to them, catching sight of them with a glance as her mother sobbed into her ear. The young man rapped again, this time two solid thumps. She stared at the empty red phone booth across the street, felt her tears beginning to spill, saw three more pigeons peck the same bloody spot, totally undisturbed by the reverberating "whomp" above them.

She turned and saw the earnest stupid eyes of the young couple staring at her through the Plexiglas. They were like pigeons, waiting for something they didn't deserve, staring at her when the thing they wanted was available just a few feet from where they stood. Normally, with tourists she spoke with a light English accent to give them the impression that they'd spoken to a real Brit. It was her contribution to the tourist industry. Besides, after six months here, American English felt heavy and awkward falling out of her mouth. But now the American English came from her, her native tongue with its solid consonants.

"I'm on an international call. I am going to be a while. There's a phone booth across the street," she said with all the edgy force of restrained weeping, of all the frustration from being passed through automated telephone systems only to be told that she could not afford to say good-bye to her grandpa.

The couple was still there. She ran the back of her hand under her eyes, cleared her throat and turned to face them with the sternest face she could muster. Her mother's sobs got raspy and nearly silent, punctuating the call like hiccups.

"There is a phone booth across the street. See it? It's big and red. You can take a whole roll of pictures while you're there. Knock yourself out. I'm on an international call. *International*."

"Poland," the man said with a smile and a nod.

"United States," she said, pointing at the receiver.

"We. Poland."

"America," she said.

The couple nodded and smiled. "America! We. Poland."

"My grandpa died and I'm trying to get home."

"America!" they said. They nodded.

She said good-bye to her mother, promising to call back later, hastily vacating the booth so that Poland could use the phone. She made her way back to the square, determined to begin her day.

At the zebra crossing she saw a dead pigeon crumpled in the gutter, its head at an unnatural angle, its feathers stained from the muck of the street. It had been a Mary Poppins pigeon. Of all the pigeons in this city, she had never seen a dead one. Perhaps she thought them immortal, as though they were just this great mass, this one great life force that transferred its energy as it ebbed around the tourists and the lions, as it crapped on the heads of the tourists and the lions. She stepped into the street and touched it with her foot. The body gave against the slight pressure, like a beanbag. A shudder twisted her shoulders up toward her ears and she shook it off. She touched the pigeon again, harder. It rolled up slightly, tipping back when she withdrew her foot.

Looking back toward the square, she watched the tourists for a moment, hoping to go unnoticed as she squatted down above the bird, the dirty bird. There were crews that did this, she knew, but her hand touched the wet mangy feathers of the bird's broad chest. She found it heavier than she imagined it would be, and its spine bent backward across her palm, on the verge of snapping, she thought. Its head and feet swayed as she lifted it, as she held it in her right hand like an offering to a passing Black Cab. She carried it to a garbage can and dropped it in, watched as the empty paper bags of bird feed fell on top of it, hiding it away from the little children who would cry if they saw a dead pigeon. It fell back into layers and layers, as the center gave beneath it.

Her hand felt dirty. She held it out unnaturally, reminding herself not to touch anything. Behind her the pigeons shifted to make up for the empty space and she, at the center of the city, waded.

II

After three hours of phone calls and bad hold music, her father had found a ticket at a grief rate. It was the 23rd now. Nearly Christmas

Eve. She rode the people movers from one end of Heathrow's International Terminal and back while the polite British voice asked her to "mind the end." The ground beneath her propelled her forward, until that end, when she had to push through the 50 feet to the next conveyor belt through the cacophony of 24-hour news stations. In each break, she felt like she was moving through water, straining against something viscous, until the ground took over once again. She rode past the discount perfume, the silk scarves and ties that would have made nice Christmas presents for her parents and the discount CDs her siblings would have loved. Duty-free on her right and left, and the ground taking on all responsibility for momentum.

A woman with a jingle-bell necklace walked by, weighed down with tax-free booze and cigars. Her dog probably had reindeer antlers. She had probably come to London to feed pigeons, and now she was heading home to share her joy. She would make it just in time for Christmas Eve. It would begin a thousand times as they crossed the ocean, hitting midnight over and over. A man at the gate asked if she was going to see her family, if they were doing something special for Christmas, and all she could say was yes.

The plane pulled west through the night over the Atlantic. The half glass of red wine hung in her head like dusty threadbare theatre curtains. The alcohol and travel rested along the back right side of her neck, wrapped up and around to her temple. She leaned back in the seat, hugged the tiny paper-covered pillow and tried to ease into the forward motion of wind currents, jet engines and journey. She drifted back to Jesse and the plane pulled west, hitting Christmas Eve over and over.

Jesse grabbed the snake by its tail, striking out at it with 12-year-old hands. She had screamed when the snake darted across her path and over her foot. But held aloft in Jesse's hand, writhing upside down, swinging its long line of a body against gravity and against a creature a thousand times its size, the thin black musculature that had seemed so ominous, so oily and noxious, dangled like a hair ribbon from his fingers. It struggled less than she thought it would. The yellow stripe against the blackness meant that it was a garter snake, infamously harmless. Its head was no larger than the point of her finger.

When she was three years old, she had been on a walk and had run ahead of her mother and Jesse's mother, while Jesse trailed behind. A snake had appeared from beneath a crisp pile of leaves, rearing up a

foot high and hissing, puffing its head out like a cobra's hood. One remembers so little from three, but the image of the snake, the sound of the piercing air a hiss length from her face, the brown hood and upturned nose stayed with her and appeared in moments of fear with a sharp intake of breath. Her grandfather killed it with a shovel while she waited in the house, curled up on her mother's lap. She remembered her grandfather walking with measured strides across the backyard to the woods. As much as the snake had scared her, she didn't want it to die; she didn't want anything to die.

She didn't want grandfathers to die, but at three, she didn't know that they could. That they would. She just knew that sometimes things couldn't come back and that it made people sad.

Her grandfather disposed of the snake with four downward thrusts of a sharp shovel blade and buried the pieced corpse there beneath the leaves. Three days before, he had killed its mate. He had never seen such a snake before, he told everyone over dinner preparations as he dumped heaping piles of seasoned salt over the raw, washed pork chops. Perhaps he had said that to make her feel better about her fear, about screaming and running from the snake. With this statement, it was an evil alien snake that even her wise, farmer grandfather could not identify. It could have been poisonous. It could have smuggled itself in a fruit box from India. But her grandfather was not one for exaggeration. He disposed of a strange snake, then its mate, and life continued on at a measured pace from chore to chore.

But the garter snake dangling from Jesse's fingers was no cobra. Though she feared snakes, had spent many years of her life too terrified to step foot in a reptile house, the little black snake's lazy twisting pushed aside the memory of the brown cobra snake.

"Let it go," she said.

Jesse dropped to one knee and pulled his knife out of his back pocket. He flipped the blade open with the side of his thumb, then clamped the blade between his lips. He used his now free hands to turn the snake over, to expose its lighter underbelly, the tiles of its underneath, and he held the snake by its head, caught the finger-sized skull between his pointer and thumb. There, above the snake, Jesse's cross necklace dangled. It was a leather thong with the cross made from different-colored beads, each bead representing something—life, blood, sacrifice, love, salvation—and it swayed as the snake had only a moment before. Now the snake struggled against the pressure, against

being so exposed and overpowered. Jesse pulled the knife from his mouth and with an overhand motion thrust the pointed tip into the snake's throat.

The snake screamed with its body, first going rigid and then undulating desperately sideways and up and down, roiling as the knife bounced against its rubbery skin and nearly collapsed on the boy's dirty fingers. She told him not to do it, but perhaps too softly. She thought to look away, but stared as he rested the point against the snake's throat and then pushed, applying pressure with patience, putting the tip of the blade between two tiles of off-yellow skin. The snake struggled again, the pain apparent in every flick of the tiny tail against the dirt path. The skin of the throat stretched to breaking and the knife slid past it into the snake. Jesse's cross swung above it, pendulumlike. The gold bead at the center of the cross caught the light and glinted as the snake's thrashings turned languid and then it stilled. Jesse breathed hard, as though they had run up the sides of the ravine, but they had not.

He picked the snake up by its tail and dangled it again. This time it swayed like the rope swing over the crick with aimless, uneven twisting motions. Dark blood seeped down its tiny jaw muscles and made a spot on the dirt path by Jesse's feet. The blood came in a stream and then began to drip. Only when the drops seemed to stop did he look up at her.

Jesse had watery blue eyes and wavy brown hair, a cute face that inched toward handsome with every passing year. His body already hinted at the lean runner's silhouette it would become. He always wore a cross around his neck, even when they threw on old clothes to wear in the woods—torn jeans and ugly too-small T-shirts. He held the snake out in front of him, his arm rigid. Their eyes met and then their gazes dropped to the snake.

She felt her eyes get watery, her throat tense, but she refused to cry, especially in front of Jesse. Her sinewy, as yet undeveloped body still looked like a boy's body, and in her heart, she was a boy, more comfortable in mud and cutoffs than in Barbie Dream Houses. They both looked back into the woods, toward their fort, and he led the way, snake still limply, sickly dangling from his outstretched arm.

She followed him down the steep ravine slope, walking sideways on her feet, digging little trenches with each step so as not to slide down the hill on the soft soil and slick leaf covering. They followed

their regular path, moving from tree to tree, checking their balance and foothold at each one, guiding themselves back down to the crick. The sky was beginning to go lavender and it was getting on to suppertime. Their mothers would be waiting. They would still have to wash up before they ate, at least scrub their hands and arms and faces and strip off the silty ravine-stained clothes.

At the center of the stream, there was a tiny island, a sandbar exposed by a dry autumn. They had found four fallen branches, an old half-decomposed tarp and some twine. With these items, they had constructed a tepee. It lacked the grace of a real tepee because two of the branches were much longer than the others and the blue tarp covered only three quarters of the outside. They rarely went into the tepee—they feared it would tip over with them inside—but they had spent two days building it and afterward they had spent another two days building a stepping-stone bridge out to the island.

Jesse walked along the stepping-stones and motioned with his free hand for her to follow. He stopped at the tepee's entrance and looked up at the juncture of the beams. They had wrapped the twine around each branch until the entire ball was gone. They had then walked the structure upright and pulled each branch out until it balanced on its own. The tepee had fallen over a few times before they found the best way. If the fort hadn't been a secret, they would have shown it off to everyone. Jesse stood in front of the threshold, looking up. The place where the branches met was just out of his reach, and he was a foot taller than she.

"You have to do it," he said.

She paused.

"I'll hold you up."

She walked to his side and he held the snake out to her. She took it from him, holding it at the very tip of its tail, so that the snake seemed suspended in the space between her fingers. She felt the sway of its body, the tightness in her throat as the snake's weight shifted in that suspended space. The head nearly touched her as it swung and she sucked her body in and away from it, missing it barely.

Then she felt Jesse's hands on her waist, his strong hands that already looked like men's hands, each knuckle visible, nails short, fingertips rounded. His fingers touched her undecided waist and she forgot about the snake. They tightened their grip around her, and the snake's head brushed against her side. She stepped back into him and he counted to three, bouncing lightly with her and then heaving her

into the air as she jumped and reached with the snake toward the place where all the branches met. She let the snake go and the tension of its spine held it in the gap between two branches.

They waited for a couple of minutes, but the snake stayed in place. They waited until it stopped swaying, till it hung over the entrance to their tepee like a prize or a warning. It dangled in the break of the blue tarp and they washed their hands in the crick and went home.

A day later it rained hard. The stream took back the tepee island and washed the structure downstream, where it stopped against a fallen tree. The snake still held between the branches and they saw it, caught in the current, unfurled and waving like seaweed. By the next time they got out to the woods, the stream had carried it away. They never told anyone about the snake.

On the plane, when she closed her eyes, she saw the brown cobra snake overlapped by the dead garter snake stretched out in the current. With a breath she let the snakes go and remembered Jesse's fingers digging into her waist and lifting her into the air.

III

Her clothes clung to her, sticky and wrinkled and stale, but appropriately black. She was certain they did not look as bad as they felt, but she felt ripe and medieval stewed in her own juices. Her clothes felt pasted to her as she pushed the cab door open and swung her backpack over a shoulder. In her purse she found the 20 she'd bought for an exorbitant rate at the airport. Did he know how much that 20 cost her? She had half a mind to give him a handful of heavy gold-colored one-pound coins, too; they were heavy and felt like money in your pocket.

He looked at her face, and not at the cash she pressed into his hands. He had deep black eyes, the kind of eyes colonizers always admire in people of the Orient—inky, ancient, breathing. Having gotten out to help with her bag—they both knew she needed no help with the bag—he stood in the cold winter afternoon, clouds of steam forming frost on his beard and mustache. The heat escaped from his still-running car; the meter's red digital display caught her gaze. He wrapped his fingers around hers as she left the crisp green bill there, and she looked away from his soulful eyes and the heartbreaking humanity of pity.

"Merry Christmas Eve," she whispered.

The cabbie's nearly bad muffler grumbled and tainted the air with sulfur as he pulled away and she looked up at the funeral home's sign.

She had fled from the sun across the ocean, and now the hours and the light were dreamlike, painful and heavy. The voices in loudspeakers and on radios now sounded like her own, heavy with Midwestern Rs. She looked across the ice-slicked parking lot, saw her father's blue sedan and her aunt's silver one. The bodies were a dull gray, covered in salt, but still familiar.

Suddenly, almost panicked, she looked for birds, for signs of life, but there were no pigeons here. The building waited for her. It was Christmas Eve, and she was finally surrounded by trees, but now she wanted pigeons. The Midwestern bitter cold cut through the thin wool jacket that could hold London out. Even her flannel scarf seemed to be giving up, letting the ice seep in along her neck. Her hands trembled in her jacket pockets and she remembered the dead pigeon. She closed that hand in a fist to prevent it from touching anything, even the pocket lining. If she had a fag, if she smoked, she would light up now, and her lungs would burn, and her breath would be opaque and toxic.

"Miss? Are you with the Leonard family?"

"Yes," she responded with the light British accent that she used for the tourists.

He wore a nice suit and a tie somber enough for the occasion, with bright threads of hope, a swirl of comfort and a touch of character. The cold did not bother him as he leaned against the door, let the heat out and invited her in. A smog of flower perfume rolled out with the warmth. He gazed at her with the "I'm so sorry" look he had had to master for his profession, a genuine but oft-repeated facial gesture of empathy and helpfulness.

She walked up the Astroturf-covered steps, let the scent of lilies and roses cover her with their incense-thick perfume. Her feet sank deep into the thickly padded sea-foam-green carpet. It took effort to pull her foot up out of the mire of the plushness, to move herself forward through it. Ahead, she saw the open double doors of the only parlor open today, her family's name in removable plastic letters stuck into a black felt sign. To her right she saw a brass sign pointing toward the bathroom.

The parlor, she knew, was a big room ringed in folding chairs, with her small family gathered at the front around a body in a coffin. They were all waiting for her. The funeral started in less than an hour.

To the right, the bathroom would be down a stretch of ankle-deep sea-foam-colored carpet. The fixtures would be brass, and a brass-covered Kleenex dispenser would be prominently displayed, white paper tissues lifting out with a rush and a sigh, reaching upward—unscented, soft and dustless. All the ostentation of funeral, the luxury of grief. She wanted to wash her hands again.

"Miss, there's not much time," the undertaker whispered, taking her arm at the elbow and steering her toward the parlor. He maneuvered the grief-stricken for a living, she knew. He had a talent for making the carpet become buoyant, for taking on the responsibility of forward motion with a squeeze of the elbow.

They needed to get in and out of the church. The children had to practice for the pageant. Years ago she had wanted to be Mary, but they gave the part to a prettier girl, and they made her the angel that carries Jesus's birthday cake. Her grandfather had been so proud of her, a tiny girl and a giant cake, and not a crumb dropped. He waited with her in the hall. He lit the candle with a match from the tattered matchbook that he pulled out of his suit pocket. Through the lilies, she caught the remembered smell of sulfur.

The undertaker released her at the end of the chairs and walked dutifully toward the closed casket. Her mother and sister shuffled up to her, hugged her and whispered damp funeral words to her neck. Her grandmother knelt before the coffin mouthing a silent rosary. No one asked about the flight or about the weather in England or the quality of the airline food or her inevitable jet lag.

They, the family, would get to see him. They, the undertakers, had done a pretty good job, he thought. He spoke in a low, respectful voice that always seemed to begin with "I know this is hard . . ." whether or not he said the phrase. Pausing with his hand on the door, he looked down and away, toward the yellow rose arrangement someone's in-laws had sent. The family bunched around the kneelers, all shoulder to shoulder and back to front, allowing themselves an unobstructed but framed view of the body.

The body lay on a bed of white satin, the skin the orangey peach of pancake makeup, though the thick layer still did not cover the distinctive age spot above his right temple. Her eyes passed over the face that seemed too flat on one side, the side facing away from them.

A year ago to the day, her grandfather had set up his BB gun at the kitchen table as the women prepared pies and food for dinner. It

was on his list of things to do: 50 sit-ups, play accordion, kill pigeons. She watched him pull the window open, sit down and wait for the dirty birds.

"Grandpa, you can't kill pigeons on Christmas Eve," she had said, half scolding.

He looked at her and smiled, squeezed her hand with his right hand and agreed to hold off on the pigeon killing for a day or two. His hands were hard, she recalled, but still big, even though she'd grown.

She tried to force herself to look at the body, to say the necessary good-byes, to preserve the image of his corpse as a permanent memory, but her eyes drifted away from the face, down to his hands that were folded around a rosary and resting on his abdomen. She tried to tell herself to remember this moment. It was why they had open caskets. Her eyes passed to her grandmother's thin shoulder, through the black wool jacket to the kitchen table to Christmas Eve to the smell of Jesus's birthday cake to hard hands cradling her cheek.

Crossing Over: Hank Williams, Sam Cooke and the Birth of Modern Soul and Country

By Richard Taskin

Lovesick Blues: "The Life of Hank Williams," by Paul Hemphill.
New York: Viking, 2005

Dream Boogie: "The Triumph of Sam Cooke," by Peter Guralnick.
Boston: Little Brown, 2005

Hank Williams: Honky Tonk Blues. Written and Produced by Morgan
Neville and Colin Escott. PBS *American Masters* series, 2004

Sam Cooke: Legend. Written by Peter Guralnick. ABKCO Music and
Records (DVD), 2003

One Night Stand! Sam Cooke Live at the Harlem Square Club, 1963 RCA/
Legacy (CD) 2005

The years after World War II saw the emergence of youth culture in the United States. The advent of rock-'n'-roll music in the 1950s was its most visible symbol. What becomes increasingly striking from a half century later is the extent to which that music helped create new and different forms of racial consciousness. White and black singers in the 1940s and '50s synthesized national styles and not only helped forge a new musical sensibility but also stirred a new racial consciousness that challenged long-held barriers between the races.

Recent biographies of two figures who emerged from this era offer some striking parallels in the history and fate of that new sound. The story of how Sam Cook, boy-wonder singer of the gospel legends the Soul Stirrers, became Sam Cooke, the original soul singer and one of the first black singers to cross over to a white audience, and of how Hiram Williams, the sickly child of a single madam, became Hank Williams, the king of country music, tells us a lot about the role of popular music in the history of race relations in the last century.

The careers of both men are studies in racial reinvention. Both grew up in a rigidly segregated world, yet somehow both developed musical sensibilities that suggest a profound racial mixing. Both were steeped in the music of the church, and their careers blossomed during the golden age of gospel music. Both wrote much of their own material well before the advent of the singer-songwriter in the 1960s and, most of all, both died prematurely under tragic circumstances that seemed like a Sunday sermon on the pitfalls of fame.

The words "lean and hungry" appear in the first sentence of Paul Hemphill's biography to describe the South Alabama country where Hank grew up, but in some ways they describe Hank himself. Hemphill, who has written extensively about the South and grew up listening to Hank with his truck-driving dad, employs a Hemingwaylike sparseness to tell his story. For Hemphill, who devoted much of his career to writing about the Southland, *Lovesick Blues* is something of the capstone of his career.

The man who as a teenager renamed himself Hank Williams was born Hiram in 1923. His father suffered from a debilitating injury he suffered at the end of World War I in a Parisian nightclub brawl over a woman. Hank's mother, Lillie Williams, a physically imposing and at times brutal figure, pushed Hank relentlessly. She never doubted his talent for a second, though she wasn't afraid to let him know that booze would make him worthless, just like his father.

As a child, Hank sold peanuts on the street, shined shoes and, at the age of 11, became mesmerized by Rufus "Tee-Tot" Payne, a Greenville street singer who sang blues and gospel. The sight of the tall, skinny 11- or 12-year-old white boy tagging along with a fiftysomething black man is, of course, an image right out of *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*. Like Huck and Jim, what we have here is a rural white boy raised in the racist South who finds in the culture

and kindness of an older black man a way to bridge the horrible racial divide between white and black Americans.

Granted, Hank Williams was aware of minstrelry and its demeaning treatment of blacks, and his songs contain references to "colored people." He probably learned the song that made him famous, "Lovesick Blues," from a 1920s recording by a blackface singer named Emmett Miller, who billed himself as the "minstrel man from Georgia." Yet however conventional Williams' attitudes toward blacks were, his playing and singing reflected a genuine respect for the blues, and has led Hank Williams Jr., for one, to proclaim him a blues singer.

Hank's relationship with "Tee-Tot" is only one of many insights into Williams' work that Morgan Neville and Colin Escott provide in the PBS *American Masters* series *Hank Williams: Honky Tonk Blues*. Of the 90 or so musicians who over the years played behind Hank in his band The Drifting Cowboys, the documentary tracks down the key players as well as some genuine characters who made brief appearances in the band. As old men, they recall Hank as a man who overcame great physical pain, spree drinking and a disastrous family life while composing some of the finest songs in the history of country music. Indeed, although Williams' relationship with his mom, and his even more stormy relationship with his first wife, Audrey, are the stuff of country legends (and numerous Hank Williams tunes), it was clear that both recognized and championed his talent, and the surviving Drifting Cowboys make it clear that it is impossible to have imagined his career's having achieved the level of success his music has attained without both of them to goad him and champion him.

Sam Cooke, on the other hand, was a self-starter. Were he alive, he would be celebrating his 75th birthday this year. If Hank Williams' upbringing and worldview gave voice to the rural Southerners depicted in *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men*, the arc of Sam Cooke's life reflected the great internal migration of black Americans from the rural South to the capital of the "promised land" of Chicago and beyond. Born Sam Cook in Clarksdale, Mississippi, he was the "adored middle child of a Church of Christ minister with untrammelled ambitions for his children" (Guralnick 9). Charles Cook found work in the Reynolds Metal plant in McCook, Illinois, but found time to preach and organized his large family into a gospel group called The Singing Children. At the age of six, Sam sang tenor and, according to his brothers, was already focused on a

musical career. Not only did he sit at the feet of numerous gospel singers in storefront churches but, as Peter Guralnick makes clear, at a very young age he was aware of the black crossover vocal group The Ink Spots and the cool vocal styles of Bing Crosby and Gene Autry. He wanted to reach a wider audience, which meant a white audience.

Cooke grew up in the intensely competitive world of gospel singing, which in the years after World War II experienced what is now considered to be its golden era.¹ What people quickly noticed about Sam was his ambition, his relentless self-improvement, his confidence, geniality and ability to throw together an original song at a time when performers generally did not compose their own material. By the time he joined the veteran group the Soul Stirrers in 1952, he already had a huge following among younger fans in the gospel circuit who were drawn to his charisma, good looks and vocal magnetism. Here he developed the vocal curlicues and embellishments, in particular that “whoa-oh-ohs” that later would be his trademark, and it was that he single-handedly inspired young people to go to church.

Guralnick's treatment of Cooke's life reflects the turmoil and contradictions of its subject. *Dream Boogie*, he tells us, is “the story of a man who, while creating some of the most memorable pop songs of a generation, in addition to a universally recognized civil rights anthem, was himself as complex, uncategorizable and sometimes unreadable as his work was transparent” (xiv). It is perhaps that complexity that makes the story difficult to follow. Guralnick's two-part biography of Elvis Presley, *Last Train to Memphis* and *Careless Love*, succeeds because Part I in particular gives the illusion of locating for the reader its subject's unreal world. *Dream Boogie* suffers in part because an ever shuffling cast of characters never seem to get us to the “real” Sam Cooke, and, to be blunt, at times the book is confusing as hell.²

Perhaps part of Guralnick's problem is that the turmoil in the text reflects the turmoil in Cooke's career. He enjoyed hit singles regularly, but there always seemed to be a good deal of uncertainty about what direction his music would take and what sort of audience he wanted. He clearly appealed to the growing teen market of the rock-

¹For the golden age of gospel, see Anthony Heilbut, *The Gospel Sound: “Good News for Bad Times”* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1971).

²See Peter Guralnick, *Last Train to Memphis: “The Rise of Elvis Presley”* (Boston: Little Brown, 1994); *Careless Love: “The Unmaking of Elvis Presley”* (Boston: Little Brown, 1999).

'n'-roll era, but he also yearned for an adult contemporary biracial audience. Cooke envisioned his career in the mode of Harry Belafonte, Sammy Davis Jr., Nat "King" Cole, Dean Martin and Frank Sinatra. In many ways, this attempt at crossover success seriously hampered Cooke's artistry. He made records devoted to the music of Billie Holliday, Duke Ellington and Irving Berlin that in the abstract seem intriguing, but as Guralnick makes clear, the results were forgettable. Cooke experienced one of the greatest setbacks of his career when he was booked with borscht belt comedian Myron Cohen at the Copacabana Club in New York City and, not surprisingly, bombed. The (I think) unintended irony of the video biography Guralnick put together for VH-1 a few years ago is that many of the Cooke performances that survive on videotape are stilted, wooden and unnecessarily genteel attempts at placating a white audience.

By contrast, the 1963 recording *Live at the Harlem Square Club*, issued on CD for the first time in 2005, gives a taste of what some of Cooke's legendary live performances were like, going back to his days as a teenager when, as a member of the Soul Stirrers, Sam and his group would enter from the back of the church and come down the aisle singing and "turn out" church after church. A very Otis Redding-like performance of "Feel It (Don't Fight It)" highlights 35 minutes of one Cooke original classic after another, including "Bring It On Home to Me," "Twistin' the Night Away," "Cupid" and "We're Havin' a Party."

Both Williams and Cooke died young. The suddenness of their deaths has inevitably led to speculation about what would have happened if they had lived. In Hank's case, it may have been, as Hemphill writes, "a good career move" to die at the height of his fame with one of his most famous compositions, "Your Cheatin' Heart," as yet unreleased. A perfect epilogue to Hank's work, it summarized but did not represent a transformation of his sound. He may have had more good songs left in him: Certainly, the ethos of rock 'n' roll was already present in much of his music and life, and, unlike that of most country singers, his career may have survived Elvis. On the other hand, the "maturity" of Williams' work—the extraordinary number of first-rate compositions, the demo records and hours of radio shows he left behind along with his 60-plus recordings—do not leave listeners with a sense that there is something incomplete about his career or unfinished in his legacy.

Sam Cooke was riding high at the time of his death, writing and producing hits on a regular basis. He once wrote that he burned "with ambition to achieve the kind of show-business stature that Harry Belafonte and Nat 'King' Cole have achieved," but that was not all. He also wanted to attain "the kind of stature Jackie Robinson and Dr. Ralph Bunch . . . achieved in their fields" (Guralnick 335–336). Indeed, Sam Cooke's career as a secular singer occurred during the height of the civil rights movement. In 1958, he performed before an integrated audience on a live remote broadcast of Dick Clark's *American Bandstand* despite death threats and the presence of Ku Klux Klan members in the audience and in the National Guard sent to maintain order.³ He read books on race and history, improvised music to the poems of Paul Laurence Dunbar, donated money to NAACP and refused to play before a segregated audience in Memphis in 1961. When Cassius Clay shocked the world and defeated Sonny Liston in Miami in February 1964, Cooke climbed into the ring and congratulated the champ. He even recorded a "party record" with Clay.

This highly visible show of support for Clay as he was becoming Muhammad Ali suggested a growing militance on Cooke's part. When he first heard "Blowin' in the Wind," he couldn't believe a white boy could write a song like that and damn near felt ashamed he hadn't written it himself. He wanted to write a civil rights song that was as poetic, something that would make the truth plain.

"A Change Is Gonna Come" was only a modest hit in the weeks after Cooke's death in December 1964, but its stature has grown immeasurably over the years. Its elegiac quality made it the song that powers the closing scenes of Spike Lee's *Malcolm X*. It is a song unlike anything Cooke had ever written. It was a song about the "struggle": both that for civil rights for all Americans and the struggle within. The verses speak of rejection and defeat:

I go to the movies, and I go downtown
Somebody keep telling me "Don't hang around. . . ."

I go to my brother and I say, "Brother, help me please"
But he winds up knocking me back down on my knees

³For the Atlanta incident, see Dick Clark, *Rock, Roll & Remember* (New York: Thomas Y. Crowell 1976) 133–134.

And when Cooke sings "I don't know what's up there on the other side," it speaks of his own crisis of faith after his only son's tragic drowning in 1963. It also foreshadows his own death later that year and directly challenges the chorus of "I know a change is gonna come oh yes it will" and, at the very least, reminds us that the change isn't going to come, oh, say, within 40 years of Cooke's death.⁴ No wonder when Sam Cooke first played the record for his protégé Bobby Womack and asked what he thought of the tune, the answer he got was "It feels like death." Yet somehow it inspires us with a sense that we must carry on amidst tragedy. Maybe that's what Rosa Parks had in mind when she and her mother played the record again and again after hearing of the death of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.

On the day of his death, Sam Cooke was telling friends about his next album project, a down-home version of the blues in the tradition of Howlin' Wolf and Muddy Waters. He was a singer-songwriter and entrepreneur (he co-owned his own record label and wrote and produced for other artists on the side) before the record business was "revolutionized" in the late 1960s from a few major labels and some independents to a small group of multinational corporations. Certainly, "A Change Is Gonna Come" gives every indication that his abilities as a songwriter were nowhere near tapped out, and he may have pursued any number of political or artistic directions in the coming decades.

As the United States quietly resegregated in the 1990s, the music of the period reflected the new division street.⁵ What is remarkable and often unremarked upon is that black and white musicians seem to have been far more conscious of one another 50 years ago than they are today in an era of niche marketing and carefully defined market demographics, one in which it certainly appears that black entertainers in particular are more segregated by choice and design than they have been in generations. Sam Cooke once famously sang in a tune he wrote that he didn't "know much about history."⁶ The reality is different and the musical legacy he and Hank Williams have left us is one that speaks to the unrealized possibilities of American life.

⁴ Lyrics from "A Change Is Gonna Come" written by Sam Cooke. Copyright 1964, renewed 1992, ABKCO Music Inc. (BMI). All rights reserved.

⁵ On resegregation in the 1990s, see James T. Patterson, *Brown v. Board of Education: "A Civil Rights Milestone and Its Troubled Legacy"* (New York: Oxford, 2001) 191–205.

⁶ Lyrics from "(What a) Wonderful World" written by Sam Cooke, Herb Alpert and Lou Adler. Copyright 1959, renewed 1987, ABKCO Music Inc. (BMI). All rights reserved.

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